The Pitcairn Perspectives

Philip Spires

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by

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All warfare is based on deception

Sun Tzu

The Art of War

Editor’s note

Fiction is the only definitive world. In our shared, illusory reality, all ends are loose, possibly, if not merely ignored, waiting to be speculatively tied, albeit forever impermanently. When we evaluate ourselves, we note these disconnects and ask ourselves whether they might be joined, or in what way their disconnect might have been avoided, despite our not believing the alternative. What could we do in the future to avoid the mistake, indeed, to improve, to make a better job of that we intended? And improve we must, so we can never be complacent. No matter how many years of experience we may claim, there is always something we could do better, always something new to be learned, always advantageous change to be made.

If we examine, for instance, this sequence of recent events can we find a pattern? Can we note options that could have been taken, but were rejected or ignored? Can we identify decisions that led us to dead ends? Can we imagine remaking some of those same choices in some way which might have directed us to a different route? And where, indeed, do we expect these different options might have led?

Of course, we must forever be aware of the needs of those who support us, those who provide for our survival, those who nurture us. But their needs and our needs are one in the common good, which is the achievement of the end we jointly seek and which we own in common.

Fostering our own interest is to foster our shared interests: the two can never be separate. The precise road that might lead to that end, however, remains uncertain. We can see the horizon, but not what lies between the here and there.

So, when we examine these disparate documents, all relating to one venture, but sourced from different actors and routes, can we apply our retrospective but reflective judgment to improve? Is there a remedial action we could take? Is there a path that could have avoided the errors? Can we learn from our mistakes?

I apologize for being selective. After all, it is a platitude and tautology to point out that the only way of receiving real time experience is to receive experience in real time. The story, here, involves several lives, each of which has taken a lifetime to live. Of course, we must select. Of course, we must summarize. So, the selected documents that follow are not the whole story, just a series of significant snapshots, some setting a scene, some recording events, an opportunity sample drawn from the bigger picture which is real time. Of course, it's not the whole story and neither does it represent the entire archive related to this case, which, of course, is vast. But what is included gives sufficient perspective and complete outline so the reader can fill in much of the detail, detail which in any case we cannot know, because we did not live it. Reliving the detail of a life takes another's lifetime, and none of us has one of those to spare.

The fact is, this near debacle worked out well for us, but at a cost, and that cost was significant. Can we learn from the mistakes and ensure we do better in the future? It's a question we must ask continually, but perhaps never answer, certainly never definitively, but suggestions certainly will arise.

The documents that follow are potentially crucial for our future. Is there need for action? How do we feel about the decisions we made? And have we, in the end, rendered our truth credible?

Edward Pitcairn’s arrival

Two weeks, like most lifetimes, would not be enough. At least that is what he said, unprompted, to Border Force as his passport was being inspected. As directed, he had tried to use one of the automatic readers. “I understand they are called e-gates,” he had said to the apparently uninterested officer. He continued some moments later by suggesting that his slumped, jet-lagged, apologetic stance must have confused the camera which had positioned, focused, refocused, and repositioned, repeatedly before the dreaded ‘Seek assistance’ displayed, prompting him to mumble “I need plenty of that.” He had replaced his glasses, re-adorned his hirsute lower face with the mandatory mask and picked up his carry-on bag which, since Singapore, carried the extra weight of two separate litres of glass-bottled gin. On approaching the desk, he offered, “I think it can’t cope with beards” to the glass-cased woman in uniform while handing over his passport and again freeing his face from the mask. He knew it was a mistake to comment, but this, like most obvious mistakes, he tended habitually to repeat.

The questions arrived and were answered. Arriving from? Singapore. Visited any other country in the last ten days? Indonesia. That’s an amber list country, so do you have a passenger locator form? He presented the readied and stapled two pages, clearly not at all confident that their draft print quality would be acceptable.

Though he always felt safer with paper, he had also uploaded a copy from his mobile to the government website, and muttered, “I have it on my phone…” Again, referring to his papers, he apologised for the lightness of the print and then offered a repeatedly rehearsed line about ink cartridges being fiercely expensive on Sawu. It was all wasted effort, as things turned out, because the officer seemed not even to want to inspect the document, either on paper or electronically. Its presence was clearly enough. As the woman behind the glass delivered her rehearsed monologue about the need for quarantine, tests and a readiness for interrogation by telephone, Edward’s thoughts began to wander, the lethargy from his lack of sleep getting the better of reality, his frame visibly sagging under the weight of each sentence. “Ten days in quarantine, then,” he said, nodding. “Two weeks will not be enough,” was again mumbled to himself as he turned away,

He had no luggage to collect, of course, but did have a mobile phone, without which none of this verbatim observation could have been recorded, a mobile that had immediately to be retrieved from the zipped pocket indeterminately placed just above the knee of his mountain trekking modular trousers (dark grey) which, in anticipation of the flight’s fierce air conditioning, he wore with the zipped lower leg attached. The device, consciously weighting against his thigh, had remained untouched while ever the signs told him that to use it might be an offense, but now, relieved of the necessity of proving whom he

might be, it could be felt, fondled, extracted, consulted and, possibly, used.

"Here goes," he whispered as he flipped open the cover of the Yogyakarta Chinese Emporium white plastic case, accessed his contact list, selected Gemma Harness, née Pitcairn, and called. He was down the stairs (escalator taped off in yellow and black stripes) and half-way past the silent retrieval carousels before it connected. It was an answering machine. "Shit!", he murmured, before speaking loud and clear, voiced raised sufficiently but not excessively, not enough to enable passers-by to share the message, "Gem, I'm here. And in one piece. Still. I'll be with you in about an hour. Tube willing."

Almost automatically, he checked his messaging app and found the expected reminder that his contract with MudahComm did not extend to calls made in the United Kingdom and that roaming charges would apply. "It's the same as using it on Sawu," he muttered out loud before, "I must remember to use the landline." He switched off his phone and replaced it in the inside pocket of the jacket he had been carrying awkwardly over his left arm since leaving the aircraft.

Events during transit, save for a private mini fracas in the gents' toilet with a soap machine that was out of commission, were not worthy of note. He followed the usual signs, obviously embedded somewhere in his reflex actions, given the frequency of his visits, but never actually committed to memory, until he arrived at the Piccadilly Line just a minute before the next train

was due. Between London Heathrow and King's Cross he snoozed, lolled and nodded off. Despite the regularity of his presence on a long-haul flight from Singapore, he had never mastered the art of sleeping on board and, try as he might, sleep now took over when it wished. Throughout the journey, he seemed oblivious to the fact that his priceless carry-on, handle still extended to the pull position, rocked precariously but ever upright in the apparently unclaimed luggage recess of the underground train. Never once did he turn to his left to check its security and never once was that security challenged by any other user of the service. Never once did he seem concerned that his bag contained things that were both unique and irreplaceable.

At King's Cross he changed to the Victoria Line to take the single stop he needed to arrive at his final destination of Highbury Fields. "I would normally change at Green Park, despite the walk," he said to the Rasta guy standing beside him as his connection grumbled to its halt at King's Cross. "But I dozed off..." Edward did not notice the smile that responded, but he did offer his own respectful grunt. He had done his duty.

Edward Pitcairn emerged at Highbury Corner into full, warm sun, similar to that he might have been expected to leave almost a day before in Yogyakarta, had it not been raining. "Holloway Road," he mumbled to himself as he set off north from the station, "Doesn't change. Never the same." And, after a ten-minute plod with his handled carry-on audibly recording the paving stones with clock-like ticks along the more than

adequate but largely empty pavement, he turned left and arrived at the door of the outwardly scruffy but prestigious end-of-terrace he now jointly owned with his daughter. It was already after eight.

Access to the house from the street, through the substantial perimeter grey brick wall, was via a barred gate that was usually locked. Edward muttered his thanks that his daughter had anticipated his arrival and had left it open. Manipulating the gate, which had an over-strong closure mechanism and an entry phone, while dragging his bag had been memorably awkward in the past. He rang the doorbell.

He rang the doorbell again.

On the fourth ring, his finger just releasing the button, the heavy panelled door swung open to reveal his granddaughter, Elsie, named after his own long-departed mother's unused middle name, was ready to greet him. "Grandaddy," she said in her squeaky, little girl voice. After another year away 'in the field' Edward suffered his usual pause of disconnect as he mentally re-associated the stream of clipped squeaks with the leggy and voluptuous twenty-five-year-old who, as ever, at eight in the morning was already made-up like a model to graze at the bowl of muesli and yogurt that she had brought with her to the door. She ate another spoonful as the "Grandaddy" faded into a granular buzz.

Elsie pushed the door right back to allow him to pass, its closure mechanism creaking through its spring's over-tension as she pushed its weight back further than usual to allow Edward and his

carry-on to enter side by side. “I think you have got to go straight up”, she said, the phrase only partially audible between the dried nuts and oat flakes, despite their yogurt lubricant.

The phrase “Is that Grandad, darling?” made its way along the long hall next to the stairs from the depths of the kitchen at the back of the house. “Can you send him up to the top floor? He’s in the front bedroom. It’s all ready.”

“Go have your breakfast, Else. I know the way.” His voice sounded as tired as he looked.

“Tell him I will bring his breakfast up in a few minutes.”

Edward turned towards Elsie, who was just about to slurp another spoon of her sloppy mix and said, “And tell your mother that she doesn’t need to shout. I can hear her quite clearly.” Edward Pitcairn then turned to his right and began to haul himself and his carry-on up to the second floor one step at a time to avoid marking the edges of the stripped but largely unpolished wooden stairs. He stopped after just three lifts, saying, “This is stupid. Why don’t I leave these here?” And with that, he stopped, unzipped the top closure of his bag and retrieved the two litre bottles of gin from Changi Airport duty free. He attempted to hand them to his granddaughter. He looked a little surprised, possibly taken aback, when she shot off down the hall in the opposite direction.

“Else,” he mumbled, as he started slowly up the stairs. “Something Else.”

“We’ve been told to wipe everything with alcohol,” she said over her shoulder.

“Just open the bottle,” he said, quietly, pausing his progress to take a breather.

A moment later it was not Elsie who reappeared with kitchen roll and a bottle of sterilizer, but his daughter Gemma, now fifty but dressed like the nineties student she had never outgrown. He had always called her ‘Gem’, a name that Edward used as a simultaneous summary of her beauty and her significance in his life. Before she spoke, she had already squeezed some of the isopropyl alcohol gel onto the paper towel and had started to rub at the bottles that hung from his right hand over the banister from three steps up. “We have to be strict, Dad,” said Gemma, as she placed the cleansed bottles side by side on the hall table, just beside the landline telephone that no one ever seemed to use anymore, but which Edward again reminded himself he must use, given the punitive roaming charges he could ill-afford to incur. “We don’t know where you’ve been, do we? Go on up and unpack. I’ll bring you a breakfast tray in a minute.”

It was one of those moments where words were unnecessary. The greeting, the expression of love, caring and welcome was implied in Gem’s tone of voice, as well as in her name, despite the habitually brusque, business-like matter-of-fact tone she adopted when addressing her father. It was a tone that Edward liked to describe as ‘parenting in reverse’. Edward turned and continued his now lighter but still awkward ascent.

It was one of those London houses that seemed taller than it was either wide or deep. It had a basement as well, besides that raised ground floor and two above, the top floor alone not having the ceiling height of the others. But still the top floor front bedroom was on a half-landing, raised another five steps above the back of the house. It was normally a cold room, but he realized as the door opened that Gemma had switched on the heating some time before, despite this being May, and inside he was reminded of being outside in Singapore, except he was still dry. He spent a moment looking out of the window, because the house was taller than those opposite and there was a reasonable view of rooftops with their largely redundant chimneys, stacks that he could just remember issuing billowed smoke from coal fires. He turned to inspect the Victorian black-iron grate in his room, now a ‘feature’ with a painted back and a display of dried flowers in a leaded vitrine in front. In his memory, he could still hear the occasional cinder drop through the grille onto the ceramic tiles of the surround. But that had been in the seventies as a newly married university lecturer in this same room, having effectively taken possession of the entire house courtesy of its former owners, John and Mary Stead, his in-laws, accountant partners, competent parents and then newly semi-retired residents of Gloucestershire. He had not even unzipped his bag when the door pushed open on the corner of a wooden tray.

“I have to hand it to you...”

“Recognition at last,” he said,

“You never miss a chance… At least I know already that senility isn’t a problem yet! Dad, I’m sorry about this, but we have to follow the rules. I will have to set this down on the table here by the door and really I shouldn’t come in.”

“Not even for an elbow touch?”

Gemma smiled and offered a bent arm which he met with his own. “It’s all very tiresome, but we have to do it. The numbers are going up…”

“Not where I have come from, Gem. But it won’t last. A virus has no concept of borders.”

“Have your breakfast and we’ll catch up later. I really want to hear about the dig. It sounds like you really have something this time. I’ll come back up in twenty minutes. I’ll sit on the chair on the landing. I’ll bring some coffee – twenty minutes, okay?”

Edward glanced at the steaming bowl on the tray. “Bless you, Gem. Chilli soup noodles - real Indonesian breakfast.”

“English tea…”

“Is there such a thing?” he asked, rhetorically as his daughter descended. Clearly the question was familiar.

Edward stood at the window as he slurped his noodles, the bowl not too hot to cradle in his left hand as the right selected morsels of greenery with chopsticks between the tangles of noodle. The lettuce chunks were still crunchy, the cos leaves having been expertly added torn, not chopped, just a moment before the hot soup was poured into the bowl, and Gem had been liberal with the dried chili, which always made him

sweat. The Japanese-style bowl and chopsticks were a little incongruous, but he was not one to complain about cultural syncretism, even if he did generally both notice and remark.

He had followed this same pattern every year, Gemma had said to her part-time partner, Geoff Sullivan, just before her father had arrived. She had described in detail how he would stand at the window to reacquaint himself with the familiar, but above all to note and store even the most minimal change in the view. He would spend several minutes staring at the geometry of the squarish St Mary Magdalene, noting also which of the trees on the compound had grown taller or possibly looked less than healthy. “This year he’ll notice that some of them have gone,” she predicted, accurately as it transpired. He would be able to make out the brickwork of Pentonville Prison, just visible between chimney pots and incorporate any new, taller structures, usually, in this part of London, schools and public buildings, into the internalised schema of his internal mental map. “It comes with being an archaeologist,” Gemma had said to Geoff (she was still embarrassed to say this name she usually described as ‘naff’). “He absorbs every detail before he is prepared to disturb anything, including time.” Gemma and Geoff had shared their alliterative, on and off partnership now for five years, itself begun five years after she had divorced that cheating swine of a husband who had given his good looks to Elsie but had reserved his infidelity for his wife. Elsie had taken the split badly, developed an eating

disorder and had needed therapy. At least that was all in the past, Gemma would regularly remark to her daughter. With Geoff, she tended not to mention anything about her past. He responded in kind.

Edward had already placed the emptied bowl on the tray and was well down his second cup of tea from the stainless-steel pot when the door to his room again opened to reveal Gemma just about to occupy the chair on the landing. He himself sat on the chair next to the dressing table, a position which allowed the two to converse face-to-face, two metres apart. She had brought the coffee she promised and had already squeezed the two pot mugs onto the breakfast tray, alongside the empty noodle bowl.

"How was the flight?"

"Long, but no longer..."

"When is your appointment?"

Edward paused for a moment, obviously surprised at his daughter's insistence that the business be done straight away, before either of them had even attempted to catch up. "Next week, Tuesday."

"You'll have to take a taxi..."

"I can go on the tube..."

"You're not allowed..."

"I came here from the airport on the tube..."

"Apparently that is allowed. It's called essential travel... as is, in your case, your doctor's appointment. But once you have reached your destination, you're supposed to stay there. No more public transport. So you will have to take a taxi."

“And a taxi is not public?”

“Dad, you’re beginning to sound like a teenager. It’s the rule. We have to tell the driver that you are in quarantine…”

“Ten days, not forty…”

“Pedant! …and then he sanitizes the taxi seat and door handles when your get out. He’ll take you and then wait to bring you back.”

“It will cost a fortune…”

“Elsie will pay for it. She has a budget for transport. An extra chit in the pile won’t even be counted. Anyway, it’s only down at University College. It’s not far. And the drivers are desperate for work at the moment because no one is travelling. Any idea how long it will take?”

“Not the foggiest… They did a biopsy in Yogyakarta and analysed it there. The results were probably on the same flight as me.”

“I doubt they have to fly…” She was clearly consciously trying not to sound concerned about her father’s health, but she was not succeeding. “So how is everything, dad? How’s your research?”

“The research is going exceptionally well. Really well. Really well indeed, I have to say.” Gemma’s raised eyebrows invited him to continue. “The dig has produced some interesting results since last year. What we don’t have in volume we certainly do have in quality. It’s always going to be hard in that climate. The samples are very sparse and very fragile. But there is no doubt in my mind that we have now proved that Flores Man was not confined to

Flores, that he might even have been a regional phenomenon."

"He and she..."

"Flores Man is a gender inclusive term, Gem, as is my use of 'he'." She smiled. He continued. "The sites are still small and most of the finds are still tools, flints, arrow heads and the like. I've written and published a detailed analysis of the characteristics as you know, and they are entirely in line with the findings from Flores, indicating that these people were culturally and technically, as well as physically similar. There have been a few bones, but they are really fragile, a bit like wet cardboard when unearthed, but uniquely on our site, less fragile than the ones found on Flores, because it's a lot drier on Sawu."

"That must be a real advantage when it comes to analysis."

"It is, but it's also proved a handicap of sorts. They tend to be more intact when we uncover them, but they do tend to pulverise immediately on contact with dry air. We have to wet them again and keep them wet, wrap them up and then dry them out in the lab under controlled conditions, adding sealants and stabilisers during the process. It makes the handling of every find a major project. We have nothing definitive yet, but I am convinced they are the same species as Flores Man, but opinions, as you know, differ. It is just as likely that the samples could be seen to represent a different species..."

"Hence the problems with your colleague... Sawu, is it?"

“Everyone at this end gets that confused. Sawu is the place. His name is Sarnu.”

“Sarnie, I could cope with...”

“So could I... One bite and he would be finished...”

“That bad, eh?”

“Probably worse...” Edward paused. It was one of those conversation cadences where everything could be assigned to the unsaid, where what each person brought to the encounter would remain implicitly but imperfectly understood, but also unchallenged. It was a moment also where opportunity marginally poked above risk, and he accepted the challenge. “My paper made a water-tight case around the similarities. The stone tools found on Flores, plus the flint shards, knives and arrow heads, all point to similar techniques being used across both islands. The nature of the materials chosen, the techniques of flaking, the attempts at shaping, they are all similar. The human remains we’ve found, however, are too scant to allow a direct comparison of physiology. What we have also agrees in part with the Flores model, but we still have so little...too little for anyone to say anything definitive.”

Gemma interrupted. “I don’t see the problem, dad. If your findings are correct and your argument fits, isn’t it more likely that your Sawu Man is the same as Flores Man? After all, they are next door to one another...”

“If only it was so simple... One, we can’t yet agree on dating. The organic material we have is all over the place, anything from two hundred thousand to twenty thousand years old. Only new

finds that can definitely be associated with our humanoids can clarify that. Second, and because of the problem with the dating, we cannot place our finds at a time when there might have been a land bridge which might have linked that eastern part of the archipelago. Third, without a land bridge, our humanoids would have needed to cross open ocean to have colonised both places, and that particular ocean poses real navigation problems even for today's sailors. Frankly, those are dangerous waters."

"And did these people have boats?"

"There's little evidence at present that they even built shelters for themselves, let alone ocean-going craft... If my argument is to hold water, so to speak, then it relies on there being no water..."

"The land bridge..."

"Precisely... Where was I? Oh yes... and fourthly, there is the interest of Professor Sarnu in establishing his legacy by having Sawu Man named after him, so he is frantically making the case for a homo sarnuensis, not homo sawuensis."

"It seems such a big fuss over the changing of a couple of letters..."

"It matters. Just imagine Pitcairn with the first letters changed to s and h, rather than p, for instance."

"How about homo pitcairniensis?"

Edward paused, indicating he had never considered such an option. "I've heard more stupid things, but I would be hard pressed to remember when... We've even had homo

hobbitiensis suggested, because you know they were probably only a metre in height, these folk."

"So maybe they were a kind of chimpanzee?"

"Theories abound, Gem, theories abound..." There was a lull in the conversation. Gemma obviously still had issues to raise, especially about her father's health. But she concluded she ought to let him have some time to recuperate.

Gemma got up. "I'll take your tray down. Do you want a rest, some more coffee?"

He nodded to request the coffee, but then continued, as if the previous thread should be pursued further. "And then fifth, of course, we have Uking."

Gemma had already bent to retrieve the tray, but the word froze her motion. Her gaze, however, did immediately turn towards her father. "Dad, please, whatever you do, go easy on that one. Elsie turns bright red and goes ballistic even at the mention of the name. The rest of the day could be written off..."

As Gemma picked up the tray and set off downstairs, they exchanged no more words, but both knew what the other wanted to say. For Edward, thoughts remained in his own sphere, where Professor Sarnu, the colleague with whom he was currently involved in a bitter academic struggle and an even more destructive battle for ownership of posterity, was from the same Chinese-Indonesian family that owned over eighty per cent of Uking Terbuka, a property development and financials company originally based in Surabaya, but now a multinational. But for Gemma, Edward's daughter, however, the

name was primarily associated with Uking Palace, a redevelopment of former industrial areas in east London, but close enough to the City to be prime real estate, and, in an irony of coincidence, it was her own daughter, Elsie, who had been and remained the most vociferous opponent of the project, had organized and led demonstrations against it, and had several times appeared in the media to make her case. She had once or twice come close to being arrested at street protests she had herself helped to organise.

“Does she know of the link?” It was clear that Edward was seeking to fill a genuine gap in his knowledge. He had no ulterior motive.

“Of course. She’s left no stone unturned. Like you, she digs up everything she can find, except that she is not looking for fossils.”

“And what drives her opposition - anti-capitalism, anarchism?” This had all come about in the last year, a year of virus pandemic, travel restrictions, lockdowns and, for Edward Pitcairn, the first time he had not travelled home for an appraisal, the only year he had ever held an academic meeting by Zoom. There was a lot that had changed, including the publication of the Uking Palace proposal.

“It’s all about the environment, dad. The planet, green spaces, re-wilding, but it’s serious, hard-edged political campaigning - there’s no cuddly toy stuff. I’ll bring up your coffee.”

“I can come down and save you the trouble.”

“No, you can’t. You’re in quarantine! You,” she said, playfully pointing a parental finger, “have to stay here!”

Edward turned again towards the window as the tray rattled its way down the stairs. Another stare through the window lasted just a couple of minutes before he turned away, moved the unopened bag off the bed onto the floor and lay down, muttering “I’ll take a minute off” to himself as he did so. Ten minutes later, Gemma appeared at the door with his coffee, only to find him fast asleep. She set the tray down again on the table by the door without disturbing him.

On the way down the stairs, she heard the front door close, slamming shut, propelled by its closure. It was Geoff on his way out, off to work. He would be doing just a half day today and then calling at the supermarket on the way home to do the weekend shopping. He was one of the few people left apparently, who could not work from home, being employed by social services as a benefits assessor, specializing in face-to-face interviews. “You ought to be getting danger money these days,” she had told him a few days before, as he was putting on his coat to go out to yet another meeting with yet more different, perhaps infectious clients. She herself, of course, worked from home these days, her academic post in Hackney Metro University no longer suffering direct student contact, but the restriction having placed massive new demands on staff to create online materials. Luckily, her institution had been involved in the creation of such materials for some time, so in her case the transformation from

office to home had been relatively smooth. Colleagues in more traditional institutions had found themselves working around the clock to fulfil course requirements at a time when the media regularly featured students demanding refund of their fees on the basis they were not being taught. Pressure, pressure... Media Studies was always a pressure point, what with its generally bad press and apparently permanent vicious internal politics alongside perennial threats of reorganisation.

Gemma by-passed the ground floor and went straight to the basement, where her study, book-lined, paper-strewn was always ready to be occupied. With Geoff away for the morning, she would put in a few Saturday hours to get ahead of her schedule for the following week. Why Geoff still was burdened by what was effectively shift work she never understood. “It’s because the clients are only available when it suits them” was his usual justification, but she never actually believed that, since she knew of no other arm of state bureaucracy that organized its affairs around the demands of its clients. She had offered the observation to her part-time partner on several occasions, but each time it had prompted only a shrug. She herself had never been one to shut up and put up, and she often asked him to complain about his conditions, without success.

By the last step on the way down, her mind was clearly already grappling again with the summary of French Cultural Studies, concentrating on Bourdieu through to Althusser. It was only then

that she remembered she had left her laptop upstairs in the kitchen. The present reawakened in her and she took to the steps with a renewed determination to work. One flight of stairs up, she turned to enter the rear of the house and chose to pause again when she saw Elsie, seated at the kitchen table, engrossed in a screen of material on her computer. It was the mother's unfinished lecture that the daughter was reading.

"I thought you were upstairs, darling, in your room."

"I came down while you were talking to grandad. I made myself scarce so as not to disturb you. This stuff you're working on is utterly fascinating."

"Given what you do, I would have thought that this would be old hat to you."

"No. Remember I was always focused on production and techniques, never theory, never the philosophy."

"Philosophy is a bit strong, dear. Let's call it sociology."

Elsie smiled. "It is fascinating, though, all this idea about culture being an expression of identity, political as well as social. It makes me wonder how and why such things change. I'm still fascinated to know where Brexit came from, for instance."

Gemma knew when to avoid an issue. Why, after all, should she want to relive a defeat? "Bourdieu really hasn't much to say about Brexit."

Elsie was not to be deterred. "It's all this talk about culture representing the complexity of the

current political reality that interests me, especially in relation to my campaigning. We all know why the planet became an issue, I suppose, but how does that issue interact with the way people act politically? Why is it, for instance, that people don't see through big developments like Uking Palace for what they are, mere acts of destruction to generate profit?"

"I think you might need a course in analysis, Elsie…"

"I really want to talk to grandad about Uking. He knows the people who own the company, doesn't he?"

"You are being very simplistic, Elsie. No, he does not know the people who own it. Uking is a multinational corporation with shareholders…"

"The family still own the vast majority of shares."

"And grandad works with one member of an extended family that would be better described as a clan. And the person concerned is a professor of archaeology, not a businessman."

"I bet he still has a load of useful insights…"

"And I wish you would call him Edward, like the rest of us. He hates 'grandad', 'grandaddy' even more."

"But you still call him 'dad'…"

The pause Gemma inserted said "that's different", but unconvincingly. "That may be, but now I need to do some work. What have you got planned for today?"

"I was hoping to talk with … Edward…"

"He's asleep. Let him rest. He's not well."

"When is his appointment?"

“Tuesday.”

“Okay. I’ll go upstairs and leave you in peace. I have some things to read.”

Just seconds later, the sound of her daughter’s ascent of the stairs to the first floor faded to silence. Gemma folded the laptop screen down, without completely closing it, unplugged the attached power lead from the socket next to the cooker which also fed a mobile phone on charge and set off along the short hall and again down the steep steps that led to the basement at the rear of the house to return to her study and her desk, which she found so cluttered she had to sweep clear a space for her computer. When Gemma finally sat at her desk and returned to the document she had left unfinished the day before, a feeling of normality visibly began to reimpose some tranquillity on a day that had thus far seemed both disrupted and awkward.

Gemma Pitcairn’s blog

Locked in, locked up, locked out… Welcome to 2020. As a vision it is perfect. As a year it is pure shit. Locked in because there is a reactive organic molecule roaming, just waiting to do its chemistry with the human genome, smacking its apparently multiple lips, each little stalk looking like a suckermouth, ready to extract the lifeblood - well the phlegm! - from any reservoir it can tap. We are locked up because we are fucked up, apparently powerless to influence this inanimate object’s hold on our lives. We are locked up because our government says we are, forced to wear masks when we go out, straying no more than one hundred metres from home. This applies to everyone, except people on bicycles, people running, people walking dogs, the vulnerable, the rich, those caring for others, anyone going shopping, certain members of parliament or political appointees, who may wander where and when they wish, whether within public gaze or out of it. If we include all women, all children, all poor people, all people of colour, the sick, the already dying, anyone in need of assistance, people who self-declare an inability to cope, the vulnerable does tend to include everyone, except for rabid libertarians and white supremacists, an unholy alliance of Tory Shires and uneducated loud white males with tattoos, who refuse to follow the rules anyway on principle, if that word might be used to describe a knee-jerk, and only if that signifies the knee of a jerk. And locked out, because we can’t go to work, students can’t go to

class, fences have gone up and fines have been threatened. It's quite a world we live in today. Hardly the separate, elevated, cloudless heaven on earth, purified of its foreign poison that Brexiteers think they voted for.

There was a time, not so long ago, when, apart from the daily disappointment of the weather, our media used to broadcast stock market figures that were sometimes up, sometimes down. Now the daily fear is an isolated number, counted as each corpse no longer coughs, no longer fights for the air that is mechanically pumped into its lungs. At least the numbers never go down. There are no crashes when deaths are counted.

Like many others of my generation, perhaps the last one to grow up without social media being a first port of call, I find I can only talk to myself by creating a blog, of all things, that no one will ever read. It is a way of passing time. Far easier, one might think, to allow time to have his own way by deliberately seeking out infection by virus and holding one's breath. Hold it for long enough and you don't recover, and the time issue is solved. If we do recover, and life goes on as normal, it is exclusively for the surviving antibodies, so we are told. Unless, of course, you-know-who mutates, ceases looking like Jack the Ripper and dons the disguise of a hungry shark. Thus, our sophisticated defences might no longer perceive threat and now the mutation, now shark-like, will start to bite all over again, and in lots of places where before it couldn't even swim. Bright, aren't we?

But what the virus, the strictures, the controls confirm is that despite our ability to offend half the planet with a few well-chosen witticisms on Twitter, another place where the uncommunicative talk to themselves, we are still slaves of the entirely local interactions of chemistry. We may debate terms, analyse motive, assess impact, at least when it applies to our own petty utterance, but when two molecules designed for each other meet, they just go for it, they react rather than interact, produce products rather than more raw material. And then, revealing that it is primarily just another tweet, the virus does reproduce itself, regenerates and re-broadcasts, commandeering material we would want to keep for ourselves. In our age of undiluted individualism, it is a virus that insists we share!

But even more paradoxically, like many others locked in against our will but perhaps for our own good, I now feel I have time on my hands, time that work, travel, illusions of social interaction and possibly Brexit used to steal from me. I was happy with being robbed; I realize! Like the super-rich, I probably have too much and don't know how to spend it. Lord knows, whoever he might be, but definitely a 'he', I have enough to do – didn't I just promise that I would put my entire course online before next term? - but for some reason when I start the task, it seems nowhere near as big as I thought. I get things done because I have no distraction, apart from that daily announcement of increasing numbers, that seems to demand my undivided attention.

And then, at the end of a week working from home, I realise that somehow, I missed the weekend, slaved at my screen for ten hours a day and, looking back, that task I thought was ‘nowhere near as big as I thought’ is just as big, just as exhausting, just as unfinished. It’s easy to imagine the end state. The impossibility, it seems, is getting there.

I have even taken to watching the daily briefing. Like a Pavlov rat, I have accommodated the reward cycle into my behaviour. Each day now, I find that just before that fixed hour, I have conveniently reached a point where a break seems inevitable. The task I set myself punctuates itself perfectly, allowing time to pour a glass of something, switch on the gogglebox and absorb the daily numbers.

The briefing is certainly daily, but rarely brief, with suited gentlemen stolidly waving graphic presentations about indices, numbers that have names and concepts that no one had even defined until a few weeks ago. It is all eagerly awaited, even lapped up by a non-comprehending public. Before now, I don’t think I’ve ever listened in such concentrated detail to the empty inanity of repeated jargon, the utterly facile dressed up as academic respectability. “It’s out there. Don’t go out!” is the sum total of the message. And yet it needs armfuls of Powerpoint slides to communicate its utterly obvious simplicity. It also needs at least three lecterns arranged Presidential-style with you-know-who in the middle, blabbing. And then they answer or ignore largely planted questions, no follow up allowed,

the mere response providing opportunity to restate the same soundbite message. The only way of catching a follow-up question is to learn to lip-read! Apparently, we are being led by science. Now there's a first.

But the extra time at home has allowed my usually focused mind to wander. Is nostalgia, I wonder, always the product of inertia? Or is it the other way around? And why do such reconstructions of the past always arrive rose-tinted? It has been years since I thought much about my mother. I am fifty. Well fifty-ish. She died when she was in her mid-sixties, denied the chance of a gentle degeneration into the living oblivion of weakness and incapacity we generally call old age. I do concede that, just a few generations ago, a human aged sixty plus had genuinely achieved old age, but times change, don't they? They do, and now sixty plus would still be 'living', as we loosely call it, even after the onset of senility. Perhaps she was never very strong, at least physically. I remember her primarily ailing, colds and flu caught from the kids at school, aches and pains, migraines, a broken arm after a tumble downstairs, shingles and then cancer, a three-year battle against herself which she lost. Is that my own prognosis? Illness dominating by the time I reach sixty? I have never considered having that much publicised genetic analysis to see if I have an enhanced risk of developing breast cancer. But what if I did have it and it came out positive? Would I be any wiser? So, the risk is greater. But I still don't actually have cancer. Is the treatment

certainty of having both breasts removed worse than a known risk of developing the disease ‘at some point in the future?’ I think we need a good dose of Bayes’ Theorem, which I probably don’t understand. Or because of this damned virus, does illness already control my life, despite the fact that I am not ill?

And yet, when I knew her, the woman I was brought up to call Penny, not mother, I was always impressed by her strengths, her resilience, her ability to make the best of a bad deal, a hand which she was regularly, arguably permanently dealt. How she coped with dad over the years I will never know. How a man could be so focused, so meticulously correct in his professional life and conduct could transform into such an unguided missile in his private life still escapes me. When I say unguided, I must qualify, because anything in a skirt was worthy of his aim, his range being both considerable and accurate. And, presumably, the missile never had a problem with launching.

It was an open relationship all along, Penny used to tell me. ‘We were children of the sixties´ she used to say. That meant, as far as I now can judge, that dad did his own thing and mum looked after the house and kids. It was about as open as a closed shop. Ours is not to reason why, she used to say, apparently ignoring the fact that she did precisely that with every other aspect of her waking life. She seemed to have a devotional blind spot when it came to the institution of marriage. It was a blind spot that dad´s behaviour rendered highly visible. Lust for life is

a phrase that comes to mind… In his case it was dad's lust for life that created a custodial sentence for my mother.

And now a message from him reminds me of his mortality, because he admits to feeling unwell, certainly another first, and is taking time away from his work, yet another. Don't worry, he says, because his maid, Fatima, is looking after him. She lives in. I bet she's not a maid as in virgin! She's twenty-four or five. He's seventy-two. There'll be a baby on the way soon, I'll bet. Another to contest his will. I wonder how many there are. I wonder if he knows himself.

There was certainly that Italian woman in Australia. He never brought her home. We never met her. What a coincidence it was that there was never a conference here in Britain! What a coincidence that the 'conferences they simply had to attend' always took place where the two of them had to stay in a hotel! When dad used to say he was in the field, the image of a rampant stallion sniffing mares' bums always came to mind.

And mom just put up with it! Never complained. They never had rows. Never shouted, never even raised a voice towards the other. She suffered him like he was just another affliction, just another ailment for which there ought to be, or indeed might not be treatment. Except, in his case, there were no pills, no ointments, only the suffering.

But he was good to her. When she was within range, his guidance system seemed to log onto her. Penny certainly came alive whenever he was

around. During those periods of absence ‘in the field’, she used to become gradually more morose, self-obsessed, utterly focused on her work, perhaps, but also self-professedly unproductive. Then he would come home and Penny would suddenly have energy to cook, clean, wash, go to the theatre, visit galleries and invite friends, things she only ever did grudgingly and without enthusiasm when dad was away. He seemed to be her energy.

We perhaps live now with chemistry, but with dad and attraction it was clearly physics, opposites attracting, the closest exerting the biggest pull. It was personification of the inverse square law. Once the interaction came close to contact, however, it was biology that took over. If the physics still applied, it was merely euphemistic, sub-atomic signifying ‘below the waist’. As for particle… And it applied to mum, just like it must have applied to that Italian woman in Australia, probably just as it now applies to an Indonesian maid fifty years his junior.

But who am I to talk? Married once, surname changed, divorced once, surname reverted. And was I patient? I certainly was not! Once a cheat, once only, and always a cheat. Goodbye, John, good riddance, and don’t come back. I had a young daughter. I kept the house. One up on you, you male chauvinist! Good riddance! But I still keep that house, keep it as in the sense that I clean it, provide for it, manage it. I still brought up that daughter without help, just like Penny did for me most of the time. Are we destined to

repeat our parents' lives, whether we like it or not? I am suddenly theoretically back to a discussion of free will versus predestination and personally back to that discussion about the breast cancer test. So, who is the mug? And precisely what, in forty years, has changed?

And now I am up to my neck again. I have Geoff, Geoff Sullivan. It's been a year now since he started to live in, even if it is only a day or two a week. I have known him for four years, a Brexit fellow traveller who, it seems, came into my home with his own version of 'remain'. How did we end up sleeping together? When Elsie first announced she was bringing a boyfriend home, I remember saying, "She's that age, I suppose." Well, what about me? Am I that age? Does forty-nine qualify for 'that age' as well? It seems that it's not only viruses or indeed dads that simply react, given the opportunity. But where did those four years since we first met go? And why did it take us over three years before we got into the sack? And it was four years on the back of another three when there was that other bloke who wandered off when responsibility raised its ugly possibility. And then there were those other three short lived fellows when we were working together on the anti-war campaign. It's all a long time ago. But it is still with me. Or is it? Can seeing someone for a week or two count as a relationship? And if not, what else might one call it? I wonder if dad had a set of classification criteria for his encounters. I wonder if Ms Chupesi was in the same group as the one-night stands? I doubt it. But why did he never let

anything show? How was it that he could do what he did in private without it ever apparently showing on his public face? Was he the brazen, uncaring, selfish, rampant male that a family face hid? Or, behind that competent, confident exterior, was he just as complex and mixed up as the rest of us?

And what about Penny? What made her simply put up and shut up for so many years? Was I really that important to her? And if she could do it, why could I not do the same on behalf of Elsie? Why did I need to put myself first?

And am I the model of my own antithesis? Communication, analysis, situation, ownership, identity, motive, these are all things I deal with upfront in anything I consider academically. But, like the molecule I probably am, when it addresses the chemistry of sex, I just react, exchange bonds, absorb and give off energy. Geoff is like my sex toy. I hardly know him. South London, he says, when I ask him where he is from. Family? Not much. Either dead or estranged. Siblings? Only child. School? Yes. University? Never. He is here when I want him. He lives here part of the time, more often than not, it seems these days. He has his own flat, he tells me on the Cally Road, but I have never been there. For all I know, he could be treating me like John Harness did, or like dad treated Mum. And do I care? Of course, I do, but what you don't see you don't know. I have no evidence he sees someone else, but I have no evidence that he does not. Can one ever prove a negative? And can one rely on the positive?

Ask a PCR test, but only after consulting with Bayes.

And how will I react if dad is really, for the first time in his life or mine, ill? Professor Edward Pitcairn has been gratefully taken for granted by all of us, especially me. I have never even conceived the idea that he might not be around. And seeing him regularly has not even been part of the argument. In the last decade, I doubt I have spent more than a month in his company. Maybe longer on reflection, because I did take Elsie to the dig site on holiday when she got into university… We had a month in July and we travelled. And now, how would I react, how indeed would I cope if dad was really ill and needed care? I don't pray, but if I did, I would now be praying that some little anonymous molecule, some probably garishly coloured reagent trying to react with cells from my dad's body withholds its chemistry and stays unattracted, negative, wherever its territory.

File under Obituaries, Pitcairn, Edward, archaeologist

Author Sarnu Onggo, PhD, Archaeology, Hackney Metro University, 1997

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Professor Edward Pitcairn PhD (8 August 1947 - ?), Professor of Archaeology, Hackney Metro University

"History forever teaches us new ways of not repeating our failures." These were the opening words of the very first lecture I heard Edward Pitcairn deliver. I copied them verbatim as he spoke, and I still have the notes from that day, framed on my wall. I was a twenty-one-year-old average freshman at the time, intimidated by my first day in class at a London University. I had chosen to study a subject that my family did not even recognize as a discipline, since it did not relate in any way they could imagine to the process of 'getting on', earning money or achieving status, so completely did they see education as a purely functional, not intellectual pursuit. But already, on that first morning, I heard a phrase that crystallized for me all the justification I might ever need for having taken my decision to study archaeology and to study it at Hackney Metro under the supervision of the already legendary Professor Edward Pitcairn.

Edward Pitcairn had been appointed Professor of Archaeology at Hackney Metro long before I arrived for my first day. Indeed, he had been in post from as long ago as the seventies. In October 1992, when that first class was given, Professor Pitcairn had already secured what remains, perhaps, his greatest achievement, which was to identify and excavate several of the aboriginal archaeological sites at Watulapitiyalu in Northern Territories, Australia. His long-term collaborator, Professor Gina Chupesi of Queensland University, with whom he worked for over twenty years, once described him as "…so thorough that he never left a stone unturned". It was a description that always drew a laugh from him, no matter how many times he heard it. His habitual comment in response was. "If I had been a binman, they would have said he never left a dustbin unemptied", a testament to the fact that all he ever wanted to achieve was competence. It was also a clear indication of his lifelong association with socialism and workers' rights and his refusal to dwell upon or even acknowledge the status of his position. He was, of course, devastated when Professor Chupesi died in a car accident in 1999, an event that was to transform his life and, indeed my own.

Edward Pitcairn was born on August 8, 1947, a date that for me, as a result of my Chinese heritage, signifies luck, or at least the possibility of experiencing it, especially in the area of wealth. Edward Pitcairn did realize that lucky start, by apparently never opting in his life to pursue anything that proved a dead end.

His parents, George and Eliza Pitcairn were both professionals, the father a doctor and the wife a teacher. Their lives had been disrupted by the war. They had planned to marry earlier, but George Pitcairn joined the army as a Medical Officer in 1939 at the outbreak of the war and remained in the service for six years until 1945. Eliza Thomas, later Pitcairn, was a teacher and thus in a reserved profession. She accompanied various groups of students evacuated from London during the bombing of the capital and spent most of those years in Dorset. The couple married in 1946 and Edward, their only child, was born just over a year later, when both parents were already in their thirties.

I mention this fact here because Edward Pitcairn, himself, often referred to it. His childhood, it seemed, was still very close, perhaps because he shared so much of it only with himself. Both his parents were over thirty years older than him and busy pursuing their own careers. As a result, he said, he was often left to his own devices as a child, often played alone and was thus free to develop his own interests independently, without social or peer pressure. This focus on what he himself perceived as right for him seemed to provide a framework for his future relationships.

The family home was established on the rural Dorset coast, Eliza Pitcairn having fallen in love with the area during her wartime exile there. She became headmistress of a local primary school, which, in keeping with the enrolment demands of the area, was small, but had a stable intake of

about forty students per year, mainly children from families involved in agricultural pursuits, who often walked considerable distances to get to school. George Pitcairn became a general practitioner, a position he never sought to change, and thus the couple soon adopted and retained a status close to that of local aristocracy by merit. When Eliza's school was closed in the early 1960s, she was transferred to Wareham, where she worked until her retirement in the seventies, while George remained the local doctor throughout the rest of his working life.

The family, thus, was perceived as a 'pillar of the community', a terrible cliché, it's true, but in the case of this family, it was nothing less than accurate. Though outsiders, they became completely accepted in local life. Indeed, such was their status that they were often called upon to officiate at community gatherings, such as opening fetes, judging flower shows and the like. For Edward Pitcairn, this meant that from an early age he grew accustomed to bearing public responsibility and comfortable with occupying a position of authority and thus became completely at ease with being in the spotlight. In one less capable than Edward, this might have bred arrogance or even snobbery, but in his case the result was the development of an acutely, perhaps over-developed sense of responsibility for other's welfare. The consequence was that he was always capable of exercising authority and engendering trust, but he never sought to control, to exploit or to dominate.

Edward Pitcairn, perhaps because of his relative isolation as an only child in a rural setting, perhaps because of some innate drive, soon became interested in history. He and the family would regularly visit castles, stately homes, museums and churches in the county and further afield on holiday. Edward once described to me how he would build his own castles on the beach, constructing battlements of true Romantic fantasy so that he could populate them with toy soldiers. He would lie on the ground or, more often than not, on the wet sand to view his creations from below as a way of imagining how impressive they might be if they were actually built. I remember his description of constructing them close to the incoming tide and then watching them being eroded and demolished by the sea, always wondering if and how any memory of their grandeur might survive.

Edward's early education was received as a combination of home tuition and formal schooling. He attended the primary school where his mother worked, but it became clear early on that the learning environment in the local school was unsuitable. The school's students, as I have said, were largely from farming families or those of agricultural labourers. The former group seemed to regard education as treading water until they took over the farm and the latter group were largely uninterested in learning. By the time Edward was seven, his parents, noting how the boy craved for more than his current educational environment could offer, decided to send him away to a private school some fifty miles distant,

where he became a weekly boarder, spending weekends at home with his parents. The school in question, Westmead, was not academically in the top league, but always claimed moderate success for its students and had the advantage of having secondary education on the same site as the junior school. Edward stayed at the school throughout, eventually achieving 'A' levels in History, English and Geography, before embarking on an archaeology degree in London.

It was at Westmead, on entering the secondary school, where Edward met a man whom he himself described as his mentor, history teacher David Pleasance. David was an Oxford graduate who was driven by a passion for education. Obviously noting an interest in his subject on behalf of the young student, he took Edward Pitcairn almost into his personal intellectual care. Edward once described to me how David Pleasance would give him personal tuition on ancient civilisations. In later years, Edward would assist Mr Pleasance in organising weekends away in London for interested boys, trips during which their teacher would conduct them through the galleries of the British Museum. Students and teacher would stay for free in the large house owned by David Pleasance's parents, four or five at a time. It would thus take the full year to expose a complete class to the visit, but Edward, as an assistant organiser, used to go every time.

Edward took a First at Queen's College, London, and then embarked on his doctorate, which focused on the then little appreciated area of Aborigine culture in Australia. The interest

seems to have arisen by virtue of his having been introduced to the subject at Queen's by Professor Gordon Chalmers, who was an authority in the area. Professor Chalmers was already involved in excavations in Australia and involved the young doctoral student in the practicalities of his research from the start. Undoubtedly, this introduction to practical archaeology cemented in Edward Pitcairn the idea that fieldwork was of paramount importance, perhaps more important even than analysis and publication. Edward Pitcairn thus began an association with subject matter that would preoccupy him for the rest of his working life, given that his eventual involvement in the prehistory of Indonesia was, at least for him, merely an extension of a regional interest that had developed primarily in northern Australia.

He took up a teaching position at Queen's on completion of his PhD as a lecturer on what were called at the time "Ethnic Studies", since archaeology proper was a title that excluded the arguably non-human. At that time, he also began his own field work in Northern Territories having met with Professor Chupesi at a conference during the early 1970s where the two academics presented a co-authored paper on the possibility of excavating the Watulapitiyalu gorges. The colleagues soon embarked upon their ground-breaking work at the site, the first publication of their results appearing in 1976, by which time Edward had already moved to Hackney Metro, his early award of a chair in 1979 arising directly

out of the already high profile work he was conducting in Australia.

To this day, the Watulapitiyalu project, which developed in both depth and breadth over the next two decades, was instrumental in changing the way the archaeological establishment viewed so-called ‘tribal’ prehistory, art and culture. Though the dating scheme that the Pitcairn-Chupesi research established has since been modified, the general thrust of their argument, that these cultures were both ancient and long-lasting, has now become accepted as the norm. At the start of their work, remnants of colonial attitudes still dominated academic opinion, and much of the Aboriginal culture of the region was seen as unworthy of detailed study. Over the two decades of their collaboration, the colleagues published either together or singly more than fifty papers and presented their findings at more than thirty conferences. Professor Chupesi was awarded membership of the Order of Australia in recognition of her achievement. It was frequently rumoured that Professor Pitcairn had been offered an honour by his own country, but equally often rumoured that he had refused the award because its title referred to the British Empire, a concept which he detested, especially since the source of his achievement was in Aboriginal Australian culture, a reality that British Imperialism had denied even existed. Edward Pitcairn, himself, always refused to comment, neither confirming the offer nor denying his refusal.

Edward Pitcairn's private life was a happy one. He met his wife, Penelope, always known as Penny, at university and they married just after they both graduated in 1969. Their only daughter, Gemma, was born in 1970 and the family lived in north London, at first sharing the house with Penny's parents, David and Mary Stead, who, after establishing a highly lucrative shared accountancy practice, had already entered semi-retirement and had taken to spending most of their time in their cottage in Gloucestershire. Edward and Penny, thus, effectively had the house to themselves from the start and it soon became a veritable social centre for Hackney Metro staff and developed a reputation for hosting frequent and animated political meetings. Edward had stayed at Queen's for just two years, the early offer of a professorship at Hackney Metro university on the strength of his Australia work tempting him to accept the apparently lower status position because of the academic freedom it offered. Throughout, Penny was a career teacher and worked in London schools, specialising in Learning Support tuition.

Edward Pitcairn joined Hackney Metro at a time when the university was quite new, its status having been changed from that of a polytechnic in the sixties. At the time, such institutions were conscious of being perceived as being of inferior status compared to older, longer established universities and he was granted great freedom to establish a significant archaeology department, with a strong emphasis on research. It is testimony to Edward Pitcairn's achievement that,

via his Aborigine work and later his Indonesian studies, he achieved precisely the status that was envisaged, thus enhancing the academic reputation of the entire institution. The fact that the department was absorbed into a broader faculty structure in 2012, with Edward taking early retirement, is more a reflection of the changing priorities in higher education rather than a comment on his work.

My own graduation from the department was in 1997. I had pursued a PhD specialising in early human habitation in South-East Asia supervised by Professor Pitcairn and the subject interested him greatly. Some seven years on, I had been lucky enough to be asked to head a team to research early hominid habitation in the Spice Islands. I knew from the start that Edward Pitcairn's participation in the project could only enhance its status and its chances of conducting useful work, so I invited him to join the team. So, just a few years after the death of Professor Chupesi, he found himself back in the region and again in the field doing active research when we jointly initiated, with Indonesian government backing, the excavations on Sawu, work that continues to this day. In 1999, Edward had stated publicly that following the death of Professor Chupesi, he would no longer be carrying out field work and that he would dedicate his time to administration and teaching. We are all richer for the fact that he did not carry through his threat.

He did, certainly, spend several years concentrating on teaching, writing and administration. But it was in 2001 that Penny

Pitcairn was diagnosed with cancer and Edward subsequently devoted himself to her care, a task that became more difficult and more time consuming over the following three years. In late 2003, he was granted a leave of absence from the university and Penny died in 2004.

Edward Pitcairn had responded to his wife's death by re-dedicating more of his time to his research and fieldwork. In fact, practical archaeology became again for him almost an obsession. In his own estimation, digging holes in the ground allowed him to fill the void left by the passing of his wife.

He had become interested in widening his interest to the region as a whole largely because Professor Chupesi wanted to do the same. Her tragic death, coupled with his wife's then on-going struggle with serious illness, thrust Edward into depression for a couple of years, during which time he refused to travel and announced his concentration on teaching. I take a certain amount of pride that, following my own graduation and his interest in my work, I was able, via projects initiated personally by me, to persuade Edward to return to the field. Over the following decade or more, it seemed that Edward learned to live again. He suddenly started to write again, and developed an almost single-minded devotion to his work, a devotion that at times demanded a little more than the utmost commitment of his colleagues.

Edward Pitcairn and I jointly managed the Sawu research for more than a decade. But it was not until three years into the project that the

significance of our work began to become apparent. As the work progressed, Edward and I realised that our work on Sawu was beginning to create a new interpretation of the early hominid population of the region. Together we had rejected the obvious interpretation of our finds because they had simply not aligned with any pre-existing scheme. It took a further two years of intense excavation and analysis for us to conclude that we were certainly looking at another manifestation of the early dwarf hominids that had populated the region up to about fifty thousand years ago. And it was only in the last two years that we demonstrated definitively that the Sawu work suggested there had existed a completely new species of hominid. Edward Pitcairn's lifetime of work thus reached its summit close to its end.

Edward Pitcairn is survived by his daughter, Gemma, and his granddaughter, Elsie, both of whom live in north London. Edward's own legacy, however, will survive in his association with Australia and Indonesia, with Watulapitiyalu and Sawu, achievements that will forever be linked to his name.

Gemma Pitcairn’s blog

I am supposed to be filming a lecture on French cultural philosophy. It’s supposed to be an overview for a second-year unit on the latter half of the twentieth century, Bergson, Sartre, de Beauvoir, Bourdieu, Derrida, Althusser, was the path I was to tread. Why do I always finish with Althusser? Is it some deep acceptance of ultimate failure, a reflection of my debatable female trait of tossing my arms in the air to signify eventual powerlessness? A plea for help, someone else’s help, anyone’s help…? And why do we, we ‘thinkers’ of the left, revel so gleefully in ultimate defeat? There was a time when the question, “Why is it that people on the left read only left-wing literature?” would automatically generate “Well, people on the right don’t read”, but that was a generation ago. Now, I suppose people on the left read The Guardian, while people on the right control the rest of the media, apart from the pondlife in the cesspit of social networks, which anyway, like anything that stems from vox pop, is dismissible as witless. Althusser would no doubt see it a corporate power’s unlimited ability to feed the obviously counterfactual into the people’s minds. Thus, they are more likely to retreat to the certain home of what they already know and this makes them easier to control and influence.

Nowadays, left and right seem to believe the same things. We have a corpus of apparently universal faith in unbridled capitalism, markets as free as possible (except in labour of course,

both sides have conspired to agree a block on mobility) and the pursuit of libertarian individualism. Left and right, of course, are coming from different places and traveling towards different destinations, but both are agreed about the route. Like all of us at the moment, they have a road map, so to speak, and the single carriageway is one way. They are starting from different places and heading, at least they believe, toward different destinations, but they are both convinced that this single route will take them to where they want to be. Opposing sides of political argument used to compete, whereas now they conspire. And now neither is honest about its motive. The right claims to offer opportunity but in fact revels in a 'natural' inequality of riches, while the left insists, like puritans of old, on suffering today towards an eventual, ever receding and indefinable salvation. It was so much easier for dad and his generation. You knew where you stood. The right imposed, the left opposed. There was no debate about which side one should take, since the tendency was probably part of birth right. The ideological badge did the rest. But was it, in fact, any simpler? Or was it all a delusion, a Manichaean struggle between opposites who eventually cooperated to deny such differences ever existed?

And, it seems to me, I am back to Althusser. If one is a participant in a system, whatever one's motivation or goal, one is always complicit in furthering that system's aims. Individuals cannot challenge entrenched power. Can we?

For all my deliberation over the cultural neutrality of all deconstructed activities and taking into account the inability of any individual act to rise above the hegemonic structures imposed by controlling interests, it seems that to be radical in today's society is to be green. I hesitate to use a capital G, because it depends on what country you are in. Like Elsie, it is the environmental campaigners who are the current proponents of direct action. For my dad, it was picket lines, strikes, industrial conflict and social change. For my generation, the issues were feminism, gender equality and consumerism, not to mention war. Though we had the odd strike, leftward momentum among the working class had shifted by the time I became active. For Elsie, however, the issues are sustainability, pollution, climate change, re-wilding and local control. So, why can't I be sympathetic? If a group of protesting students sat down along Bishopsgate and declared they wanted to stop the city to start global revolution, I might join in. When now they say they are saving the planet, I feel I ought to buy them all Bibles.

They probably all have them.

I used to understand my daughter. Or at least I thought I did. Puberty duly arrived. The blue streak through the hair went orange and then green. I had to wait in the supermarket while she insisted on sitting cross legged on the floor to survey the Whole Foods shelves above her so she could "absorb the presence of what she might like". What she might be willing to eat seemed to be an ideological decision that had to be revisited

and reinterpreted at each apparently resented mouthful. We have all been through the pulses, the grains, the vegetarianism, the veganism. It all seems to carry a weight of guilt that not even a medieval Christian would have invented. I suppose the weight in the guilt didn't count: it was only the weight on the feet that she was counting. "I'm so fat!", she would say, viewing her side-on reflection in an Oxford Street shop window while we tramped from one chain-store to the next in search of that imagined garment that "would make me look great". She's grown out of that now, or perhaps she might have grown into it. She now seems to wear ideology as fashion, an identity that needs to be changed regularly to keep it respectable. What did someone say last week... that in the Middle Ages, death was so important that it took a lifetime to prepare for it. In our own way, contemporary society seems to live by the same ever-receding credo. The difference now is that we can no longer seek a conclusion. We worship only the process.

God knows where we are now. She cooks her own food, with the stress off the cook, since it rarely seems to involve heat. All of this has to be married to an apparently blind, perhaps merely myopic faith in material consumerism, on the right because it facilitates an illusion of individuality via mass-production, and on the left because the climate crisis comes quicker and with it the never discussed, old fashioned revolution. "Reducing my carbon emissions by not lighting the gas", is something I hear almost

every evening as she switches on the kettle to rehydrate the quinoa. I shrug and go for the salad and quiche, which I buy in a condemned plastic wrapper from the deli near the station. “At least it’s local she says, around the corner.” The packet says made in Leicester. The packaging does not admit its own origin. And the guy who runs the shop is Indian.

Which all makes me sound like a cantankerous old woman... Sixty is the new forty, we were told a while ago, in tandem with white is the new black, when it comes to clothes, written by someone who doesn’t travel around London, no doubt, does not suffer the indignity of the dark streak across the bum when the dash for the gap between the closing doors is ever so slightly mistimed. And if sixty is really the new forty, then fifty must be a new thirty-five. All I can say is that it doesn’t feel like that to me! I feel a lot more than twenty-five years older than my daughter. We are different, Elsie tells me at every opportune moment, underlining the “we” with surreal stress to reinforce how apart we are when together.

But perhaps things don’t change, perhaps there is a more fundamental experience that we all live, we all share, but between questions we have to claim it in our own terms. We make assumptions that allow us to see the shortcuts, so we don’t have to keep solving the same imponderables every time we try to think, and this creates culture. I must talk to dad about this. Just how much evidence exists as to whether we humans chose arbitrary change to justify

identity? Did many societies, I wonder, go as far as the ancient Paracan cultures and use stones to force infant heads to grow into different shapes? The practise must have made wars possible to fight in an era without uniforms. Even in the English Civil War we had Roundheads. I wonder if the Royalists were square? I think I might have an answer, at least an opinion.

Perhaps the effects I seek are generational, and don't show up when the time span is thousands of years. He will be here in a few weeks, ready for his annual check-up so he can return to Yogyakarta and continue screwing his Indonesian maid. I wonder how much he pays her. I wonder how much the family back home costs him? Am I cynical? Am I the cantankerous old woman I just accused myself of being? And what do I ask my dad? Would, "Just how much do you pay for each fuck?" be apposite? I suppose, given Geoff Sullivan, I am not one to speak…

Of course, I have never met her. I never met the Australian woman. I never met any of the others. Neither did my mom, as far as I know. My dad was not one to shit on his own doorstep. But shit, he did, and extensively. His duplicity was always removed by at least a three-hour flight, which might be a euphemism for the clandestine convenience of the conference.

And those were indeed the days, when academics could actually travel to listen to their colleagues from across the world offer genuinely different perspectives on their subjects, positions that were not driven by the need to attract foreign students, the need to market one's

institutional identity, the need to promote the national agenda, the need to maintain the social media profile, the need to retain one's New Right credentials. Now, after a fourth gin and it, I know I am being cynical, probably also cantankerous. I know that the lecture isn't going to get done, again. I know I am on a rant and, as usual, to myself and myself, alone. Now there's a word… But I am worried.

Dad, in his letter, admits to not feeling well. It's a first. How should I react? What should I do? Can I intervene? Can I stop him getting older? He's in hospital. It's a double first. He passed out on the dig, banged his head, may even have had a stroke. The email says he is 'under observation' in Yogyakarta. Should I go? Stupid question. We are locked down. Locked in. Locked out. Locked up. We are, let's face it, all over the place, up, down, in or out, who knows? The only reality is that we don't move. Bit like death. There are no flights. We can't travel. If he were at death's door, perhaps I could make a case, but 'under observation' certainly doesn't sound serious enough, unless it's God that's doing the observing. But then, if God was ancient Greek, being under observation was not a safe place to be. Just ask Oedipus.

The really stupid thing is that if dad were at death's door, I could go to do nothing, because there would be nothing I could do. If he really is 'under observation', I could at least help to observe, share the work, so to speak, and my presence might just influence things. We are told that placebos cure a third of all ailments. So,

‘Mummy kiss it better’ was in fact good medicine. Perhaps ‘daughter cares’ would be just as effective. If he needs care, should I have him back here in what is still, when push comes to shove, his house? Am I jumping the gun? It is an interesting question for an anti-Iraq-war campaigner. I don’t like guns. I grew up a pacifist, daughter of a Greenham Common protester and the revolutionary socialist dad, at least in his youth, which I never knew. Archaeologists ought to know about legacy and his socialism was my legacy, but it will never be recorded, let alone fossilized.

And then there’s the generation the other way, the one that extends towards youth. Do I know my daughter? I used to think that I did. But now she is her own individual, making her own way, creating her own success, bedevilling her own targets, one of which is Uking Palace, the development I have been told is crucial to the financial viability of my employer, and perhaps my job, which, let’s face it, is far from secure. I’m still glad I wrote that paper on Brexit. I had to get the anger off my chest. I knew it wouldn’t do any good, as far as the debate was concerned, but I did not expect it to become a shot straight through my own foot. I did not expect it to make the national media, to be trawled through, word by word, by the right-wing press, to be labelled hypocritical. It was identifying the use of racism, not being it! If work were a bank, my account would be overdrawn, on the verge of foreclosure. I have to do some payback…

I am fifty years old. Should I care? Damn right I should care. I need at least five years more work before I could even contemplate the early retirement I dread. Without increased institutional income, we are regularly told by administrative powers that be, powers that increasingly look and sound like the professional management they claim not to be, the cuts will fall, the axe will be swung. Or was that the other way around?

I am growing more incoherent with every mouthful. More ice. Perhaps it's a mother and daughter thing. What once seemed so distant and yet, ultimately, so close, now feels uncomfortably accommodating yet, ultimately, estranged. She is living her own life, pursuing her own career, campaigning for what she believes in, but for some reason I no longer trust her. Perhaps she should find her own place. More ice. More everything.

Medical assessment

Report on consultation with Professor Edward Pitcairn, annual health assessment prepared for Hackney Metro University, Personnel Department, Academic staff office.

I saw Professor Pitcairn on the morning of Tuesday 18 May 2021 at 9:45am in University College Hospital, London.

General notes

I have seen Professor Pitcairn almost every year for the last twelve years for the purpose of assessing whether he should, in his own interests, carry out further field work in a remote and isolated area of Indonesia. The exception was last year, 2020, when Professor Pitcairn was unable to fly to the United Kingdom because of restrictions on travel imposed by the Covid pandemic. I was advised that Professor Pitcairn would have an annual medical assessment as usual, but that it would be carried out at his local hospital in Yogyakarta. When I raised the issue of a lack of notes in his file from the assessment, Professor Pitcairn admitted that he, personally, had promised to make and keep such an appointment, but in fact never did. He blames pressure of work, lack of time and, above all, difficulties around travel. My own opinion is that he was probably already suffering some symptoms arising from his current condition during the last year and avoided the assessment because he did not want to risk having to

undergo treatment, which would have disrupted his work, and precluded further field work.

In the field, he has to spend several weeks at a time under canvas in an area where minimum temperatures are around 26 Celsius. Though climatic conditions in the area where he works are drier and cooler than are generally found in the region, he himself spends much of his working day deep in damp, bat-inhabited limestone caves, hence the need for these annual health assessments. In general, Professor Pitcairn has remained in good health, and in the past I have had no reservations whatsoever in recommending his return for a further year of fieldwork. This year, however, I cannot offer that judgment. It is my suspicion that if Professor Pitcairn had pursued his annual assessment last year, then my current assessment of his condition might have been considerably less severe.

Edward Pitcairn is 1.82 meters tall and weighs 68 kilos, which is some 10 kilos less than last year. He does not smoke, drinks moderately, but, he says, never when working in the field. He is 73 years old and ostensibly fit, is sexually active when resident in his home in Yogyakarta, where he has a stable relationship with his long-term maid, who is over thirty years his junior. Though she has children from a previous relationship, they do not live with her, being permanently resident in the maternal parents' household in the same city. Professor Pitcairn thus legally has neither dependants nor family responsibilities in Indonesia. There are thus no barriers to his not returning.

In London, he is in regular contact with his only daughter, Gemma and his granddaughter, Elsie. They are both financially secure and employed in professional roles, in academe for Gemma and media in Elsie's case. Gemma and Edward Pitcairn jointly own a substantial house in Islington, a house whose part ownership Edward transferred to his daughter a decade ago. In the light of the following, it is my judgment that the house would provide a familiar and supportive environment for him. Gemma Pitcairn has offered her father long term residence, if it be required. Edward's wife, Penny, died of breast cancer in 2004, an event which prompted Edward to embark upon fieldwork again after many years of tenure in a full-time post in Hackney Metro University in London. Professor Pitcairn spent the bulk of his academic life researching the archaeology of Australia before basing himself full time in London, during which time he cared for his wife during her illness. His desire to return to field work remained strong, and he undertook his current project in Indonesia with enthusiasm. This desire to place his practical study ahead of all other considerations is what led him, last year, to avoid reporting his symptoms and general ill health. I realize that much of this information has been included numerous times over the years, but I restate it here to provide a full picture of his current health status, given the changed circumstances to be described.

Health assessment and background

In previous years there has been little change in Edward Pitcairn's general health. Over time, he has slowed down a little and put on some weight, but he has remained generally fit, largely as a result of activity related to his work. He has never taken extra exercise because he has never needed it. As noted above, Professor Pitcairn has recently suffered some unexplained weight loss, though how recently this began I am unable to assess as a result of last year's missed evaluation. Edward Pitcairn, himself, cannot recall when it began or is unwilling to share his opinion.

He referred himself to his doctor in Yogyakarta about six months ago. He reported feeling more tired than usual and generally weaker. Unfortunately, this referral happened during a short visit from Sawu to lodge samples from the dig for analysis with the university labs. His doctor noted the reported changes in Professor Pitcairn's health but recorded no other symptoms or observations. He prescribed general vitamins and minor dietary changes, which included more fresh food and no alcohol. Professor Pitcairn returned to the field two days after the consultation. I asked Professor Pitcairn if he had modified his behaviour after this advice, especially in relation to his diet. He replied that, in the field, the provision of food and eating were communal. There was simply no scope for special consideration, especially in the area of the purchase and storage of special diets.

Some five weeks after this medical assessment, Professor Pitcairn suffered what was described by his assistant as a 'collapse'. They were

together inside one of the network of caves they were exploring for evidence of prehistoric human remains. In medical records from his doctor in Yogyakarta, documents which also record the observations of his colleagues, Professor Pitcairn is described as having passed out and fallen into a small cavern, hitting his head on an earth bank on the way down. The assistant reported that Professor Pitcairn was unconscious for five minutes, and during that time lay half submerged in standing water, since the assistant did not have the strength or the manoeuvring space to haul the considerably bigger man clear of the crevice where he had become lodged.

After regaining consciousness, Professor Pitcairn is described as having suffered several minutes of severe confusion, during which he conversed only in unconnected, random phrases, many of which made no sense to his colleagues, indicating that they did not relate in any way to his immediate surroundings or concerns. Professor Pitcairn, it must be noted, has always been a focused and alert person, so much so that during this period of uncharacteristic confusion, several of his colleagues were convinced he was dying. An hour later, Professor Pitcairn seemed to have lost all knowledge of his incapacity and could not remember either the fall or the period of recovery. Throughout the subsequent days, almost for a week, he kept asking how he had managed to hit his head, because he developed a very significant black eye as well as a lesion on his scalp. Photos taken at the time are attached. Professor Pitcairn denies passing out and has his

own explanation, an account that is not corroborated by any colleague. But if the account is at all accurate, it describes events that could not have been witnessed by anyone but Professor Pitcairn, himself, and the project co-director, who, for reasons revealed below, is unlikely to comment.

Worryingly, Professor Pitcairn seemed to invent, in the opinion of his colleagues, an altercation with Professor Sarnu, co-leader of the excavation, an argument during which, Professor Pitcairn claimed, he was punched in the eye. Unlike the fall in the cave, however, Professor Pitcairn claims he has precise recollections of where and when this happened, and indeed of the verbal argument that led up to it. In Edward Pitcairn's description of events, the argument in question took place on the same day as his fall, earlier that morning, on a beach near the site where the two men had walked for a dawn swim. It is clear from all the material I have seen, and has been clear for some time, that the two excavation leaders have not shared what might be described as 'friendship' for the last twelve months, though of course they had worked together for about ten years. Their relationship had been 'professional' and largely polite, though they fundamentally differed on many aspects of their joint project. Professor Sarnu, of course, studied under Professor Pitcairn and at that time their relationship was at least cordial, friendly, indeed, in Edward Pitcairn's own assessment. Things changed only some time after the two men began doing field work together.

Professor Pitcairn's recollection tells of the two men having left the campsite, situated on a bluff above a wide sandy beach at about five thirty in the morning, before the sun was up. Apparently, this was not an uncommon practice, and thus was not noted as anything special by their colleagues. They were swimming by first light and had returned to the beach by six thirty, where they began a discussion about the findings that Professor Pitcairn was proposing to publish. It was apparently the revelation by Professor Pitcairn of the contents and conclusions of his paper that prompted the argument.

According to Professor Pitcairn, Sarnu had claimed that there existed an agreement between the two men that they would always publish all reports of their work under joint authorship. Sarnu had disagreed with Professor Pitcairn's conclusions and had interpreted their publication in Professor Pitcairn's name alone as undermining his declared ownership of the project. Sarnu has elsewhere claimed that joint publication of findings was a precondition of Professor Pitcairn's participation in the project. Edward Pitcairn claims that no such document or even verbal agreement existed and that such conditions were never even suggested, let alone agreed. A text has come to light validating Professor Sarnu's claims, but the authenticity of the document is questioned by the administrators of Professor Pitcairn's own department and is described by Professor Pitcairn himself as "a convenient modern invention".

The argument between the two men lasted at least an hour, but no corroboration of it having taken place was reported by any colleague on the site. The two men, it appears, remained alone on the beach throughout. Professor Sarnu claims this as vindication of his claim that there was no argument, while Professor Pitcairn cites the silence as evidence of the extreme intimidation suffered by the Indonesian staff on the dig. He claims they have been instructed to keep quiet and that they are too afraid to speak out.

Professor Pitcairn then went on to describe how Sarnu had accused him of deception and duplicity, while he had accused Sarnu of plagiarism and self-aggrandizement. For an academic, a charge of plagiarism is several degrees worse than one of murder, whereas self-aggrandizement is probably par for the course. At approximately seven-thirty, Professor Pitcairn claims, Sarnu threw a surprise punch, the full force of which connected near the left eye. According to Professor Pitcairn, the punch felled him, though he did not lose consciousness. Sarnu, it appears did nothing to help his colleague, but also did not leave the beach. Professor Pitcairn describes how he sat on the sand with Sarnu standing over him 'looking threatening'. No further conversation between them was reported. After five minutes or so, Professor Pitcairn was able to stand, at which point he remembers Sarnu turning to leave. He offered his colleague no assistance. Professor Pitcairn says that Sarnu then went back to camp, while he, in order to avoid further contact with him, skipped breakfast

and went straight up to the excavation site, taking a path that avoided crossing the campsite on the way.

I am not trained in any form of mental health procedure. I am neither a psychologist nor a psychiatrist. I make a clinical observation, however, that there exists a fundamental difference in Professor Pitcairn's memories of the two events of the morning, indicating that there may be a pathological explanation. He seems to recall the argument with Sarnu in minute detail, even to the quotation of verbatim phrases. All memory of his collapse at the excavation site, however, seems to have been erased. He suggested that he may not even have suffered collapse but may have been felled by another blow to the head, delivered as he bent low over his site of interest in the dark. At the time of the reported collapse, it must be recorded, Professor Sarnu was certainly in his tent back at the camp, because there is a record of a telephone conversation between him and his department in Yogyakarta that lasted all morning. The content of that conversation is not on public record but seems to have involved an exploration of the legal consequences of expelling Professor Pitcairn from the site. It is certainly possible that the Professor's collapse in the cave at the excavation site was a delayed response to the blow to the head on the beach from Sarnu's punch. There now exists no clinical way of confirming or excluding this possibility.

After the collapse, Professor Pitcairn's colleagues describe his mental state as

‘occasionally confused’ for the rest of that day. He did walk back to the campsite unaided, but he himself recalls that his progress was slow and ponderous along paths he knew perfectly well. He was sedated by a paramedic at the campsite and retired to his tent at around four in the afternoon and slept through until the next morning. The next day, he was told to stay in bed and was then transferred to a local hospital for observation and rest. He stayed there a further seven days until a helicopter could be arranged to airlift him to hospital in Yogyakarta. The staff on site indisputably followed the correct procedures in Professor Pitcairn’s treatment. It was essential that he be moved for observation from the excavation site to the nearby Pustu Menia hospital. It could certainly be the case that the actions of on-site staff may have saved his life.

After two days in hospital on Sawu, where he was described as ‘under observation’, he was again transferred by air to Yogyakarta and was again admitted to hospital, where he spent another five days under observation, before it was decided to run several clinical tests based on new symptoms he was reporting that had not been previously recorded on his file. Full and detailed records of his treatment after admission to hospital in Sawu and then in Yogyakarta have been made available to me and the care Professor Pitcairn received was exemplary. Professor Pitcairn, himself, has subsequently suggested that the entire episode of his collapse and hospitalization was a construct to get rid of him. I have seen no evidence to support this claim, but

there were no witnesses to the morning encounter Professor Pitcairn has described and at the time of his collapse he was working with just one assistant, who has since left the team to seek employment elsewhere. His whereabouts are currently unknown. In Yogyakarta Edward Pitcairn received initial palliative care and was then under observation for a week, during which time tests were completed, before he was discharged to recuperate at home. The Yogyakarta hospital then readmitted Professor Pitcairn after three weeks. The consultant records that he wanted to repeat some of the tests he had done and at the same time carried out a thorough and professionally conducted check on his health followed by a more thorough series of tests. Professor Pitcairn had a blood test and an X-ray on his head. The blood test results were inconclusive and there was no skull fracture. Professor Pitcairn also had the usual chemical-based analysis, plus a full brain scan and later some magnetic resonance imaging of his body. The Professor was again discharged, being judged sufficiently recovered to embark on his annual leave, the date of which had been pre-arranged for some months. His doctors agreed to send the results of their analyses and tests directly to me, which they did. I received them on the Friday before Professor Pitcairn's scheduled appointment with me this morning. I can state that all the procedures carried out in Yogyakarta were of the highest professional standard.

Test results, diagnosis and prognosis

The results as communicated to me are as follows. The lesion to the scalp ostensibly caused by the fall in the cave is judged to be superficial. There is, however, evidence of sub-cranial clotting above the left eye. The evidence described points to a small, highly specific trauma to the head, in line with what would be expected from a punch. The clotting, however, does show signs of having broken up and is cited as ‘dispersing’. It was assessed again after a few days and was then described as ‘non-threatening’.

More worryingly, however, is the finding that Professor Pitcairn does have advanced pancreatic cancer. The condition was suggested by analysis of blood and urine tests and the cancer’s spread was confirmed by the body scan. It is the opinion of the Yogyakarta medical team that the condition is advanced, has spread extensively and that no surgical intervention is now possible. On the basis of the results sent to me, I concur with that assessment, but I did encourage Professor Pitcairn to allow me to repeat the same tests to clarify things. Professor Pitcairn was resistant to this idea.

I told Professor Pitcairn these details during our consultation this morning and advised him that there did exist a treatment regime involving radio- and chemotherapy, but that this would be merely palliative. It would be administered in hospital initially, then as an outpatient and finally, if the process lasted into the medium term, it could be administered at home, with visiting nurse support. I offered an assessment

that this care may prolong his life by six months, a year at most, but that the treatment's side effects would be significant. Professor Pitcairn initially stated that he would refuse such treatment. He said he would prefer to use what time he had to complete some outstanding work and could not therefore risk suffering incapacity. I explained that his current life expectancy was in the order of weeks rather than months, an opinion that made him even more resolved not to accept any form of treatment.

In any case, my advice to Professor Pitcairn was that he should not return to his fieldwork, that he should take up the offer of residence with his daughter and that he should immediately contact the university administration to communicate his decision.

I submit this as a fair and true record.

A. Khan, Senior Consultant

Hackney Metro University

Working Group on Future Funding and Recruitment Priorities, Working paper for discussion, June 2011

Preamble

The Working Group on Future Funding and Recruitment Priorities (FFRP from here) was convened a year ago in May 2010. It was established as a pre-emptive initiative to anticipate the redefining of priorities that would inevitably arise as a result of the change in government in the UK. Though we have yet to see the consequences in the area of policy directed towards higher education by the new government, at least the likely quality of those changes seem to us to be predictable.

The new government will be likely to continue the existing direction of policy that seeks to promote the operation of a market in all areas of education and widen the scope of entrepreneurial activity in the sector. This is not a major change, since this philosophy has been dominant, perhaps even hegemonic in the world of education at all levels above elementary for some decades, at least since the policy's inception via World Bank reforms associated with the structural adjustment that was associated with the 1980s debt crisis. The basis of the reform was founded on research into the 'returns to education'. Put simply this is a measure of the material and monetary advantage experienced by the educated by virtue of their pursuing educational qualifications over and

above what they could have achieved without those qualifications. This rate of return is usually expressed as a percentage, a value that represents the equivalent of an interest rate paid on bank deposits, except in the area of education it applies to the increased earnings received by an educated individual over and above what would be received without possession of the qualification. If we say, for instance, that the rate of return for degrees in engineering is ten per cent, then students graduating with university engineering degree can be considered to earn ten per cent more per annum than students without the degree. It is worth bearing in mind that over a forty-year working life, a ten per cent return per annum would result in the individual's total earnings being forty times what they would have been without the qualification. It must also be born in mind by staff members who are not mathematicians or accountants, that the rates of return to education are often much higher than ten per cent, a figure that is considerably higher than that for other forms of capital investment. This finding instigated the era when contribution to funding by individual students became the principal way that the 'finance gap' in education might be addressed, the finance gap being the shortfall between what education costs to deliver compared to the level of funding that states can offer via taxation. It took countries such as the United Kingdom, where pre-existing systems were established and entrenched, a decade or more to implement the approach in full.

Initially, this kind of analysis was applied to education systems in the Third World, a process that identified the highest returns to primary education. This was a biproduct of the fact that in many poorer societies, secondary education let alone higher education was unavailable to the majority of the population. Further work in societies where there exist no employment opportunities for graduates of education with only elementary qualifications, the rates of return to education were identified as acquired cumulatively throughout the process, with the highest rates achieved by students who completed higher education.

Now student demand for higher education is often misinterpreted by people who do not understand these rates of return. They question whether, for many students, there might exist a better, more lucrative path into a skilled trade via what is usually labelled ‘vocational training’. It is no surprise that the word ‘vocational’ is usually associated with the word ‘training’, whereas ‘academic’ is always associated with ‘degree’. Students are not stupid, however. They know that university qualifications are always associated with higher rates of return than other routes. ‘Vocational’ always means second best, unless, of course, it is associated with law, medicine, accountancy or any other ‘professional’ qualification, no matter how vocational the training on offer might be. Demand for higher education will therefore only increase in the future, because those involved in the system are

aware that it is always potentially the most lucrative route.

Until recently, higher education has not really addressed its offer in relation to anticipated demand, especially demand led by student-anticipated rates of return. We have not been what might be described as ‘market or demand led’. We have tended to notice the demand and then respond, rather than plan pre-emptively to attract and manage that demand. Certainly, we have never tried to market ourselves in a manner that would try to anticipate future demand, but we have always approached the task in a highly ad hoc manner, without applying consumer analytics to the process, as would be attempted by commercial ventures. This working group feels that this approach has to change and that the strategy we will have to follow in the future must involve a greater acknowledgement of the need to market specific kinds of educational experience, because we anticipate it will align with student demand.

What is the market?

We offer apologies for couching the debate in these terms. But the fact remains that successful institutions in the future will need to attract students and those students will not materialize unless they feel the investment will provide returns for them. In the past we have tended, though not exclusively, to allow the dictates of academic history and respectability to determine our offer. This will need to change in the future if the institution is to survive, let alone prosper. It

should be noted at this juncture that the stance of this paper is not ideological, merely pragmatic. None of the participants in the group is ideologically neo-liberal economically nor neo-conservative politically. We do, however, recognise that the political and economic environment in which our sector operates has changed and is still changing, the direction of travel currently emphasised being that of economic liberalism and the creation of a market in educational offer, within an essentially libertarian environment.

So, having located ourselves as mere observers of a process, which will certainly happen, whether we like it or not, we state as guiding principles that the future lies in attracting foreign students, that the foreign students most likely to attend are those from the fast-growing Asian economies and that the greatest demand will arise in subject areas with the greatest generality of offer, thus facilitating the greatest transferability of the skills gained, in technical terms, those areas with the greatest elasticity of substitution. In simple terms, this means we must recruit Chinese, Indonesian, Malaysian, Indian and Vietnamese students onto business, management, marketing and media courses. These subject areas do not generally require expensive technological resources that need constant updating, they do not require the construction of specialist facilities and neither do they require the recruitment of the kinds of professional teaching staff who are currently in

short supply. Such types of study also provide the institution with greater possibilities for profit.

To illustrate this scenario, we have provided detailed analysis in the annexe to the report. We have listed several types of degree course, including information systems, medicine, various forms of engineering, pure sciences, mathematics, humanities, business and social sciences. We have analysed each option as if it were a commercial proposition, with expected income from student fees compared to the costs associated with delivering and staffing the courses. It can be seen that the highest returns for our institution arise from those types of degree course which demand only general resources and where staffing can be flexible. An engineering laboratory that can accommodate only ten students to experience a particular experiment cannot be easily expanded, so student numbers on the course will forever be resource limited. A general course, however, that needs no specialist facilities can have its student numbers increased or decreased year by year as demand changes. With the technology that is emerging now, such as remote learning and local broadcasting, there arises the possibility of delivering the same teaching across several rooms, without the need for extra staff or extra specialist equipment, as long as the instruction required is non-technical. In purely economic terms, this means that the marginal cost of expanding student numbers approaches zero for these general courses, whereas the marginal cost

of expanding specialist pursuits is very high and either constant or increasing.

In relation to the list of countries above, it must be noted that the potentially most lucrative source of recruits is China. The demand for higher education is high, the desire to study overseas is significant, though not as great as is generally perceived, and the commitment to education is strong. Unfortunately, we in Hackney Metro are not at the forefront of the minds of our potential students. We start from a weaker position than most other institutions in the sector simply because we have not had university status for as long and, of course, it takes time to build a reputation. Given this position, it is necessary for Hackney Metro to develop innovatory methods of quickly expanding our presence in the overseas student market.

Fortuitously, we do have an option to pursue. Quite by chance, following the recruitment of an individual Indonesian student some years ago, Hackney Metro has developed links with Uking Terbuka, the Indonesian conglomerate. The source of the link was entirely fortuitous, in that it stemmed from the personal relationship that developed between Professor Edward Pitcairn, Archaeology, and his doctoral student Dr. Sarnu Onggo, a relationship that has already generated a high-profile research project with the Indonesian Government as co-sponsor. Dr. Sarnu Onggo's family happen to own a multinational conglomerate and, quite independently of the archaeological dig, representatives of the company approached the university to examine

avenues of further cooperation. These links began in the area of business and management, but have since expanded to other areas, though all joint initiatives have thus far been small in scale. We thus make a highly pragmatic recommendation that Hackney Metro begins this new phase of development by seeking to expand these links.

Some months ago, the University Senate was approached by Uking Terbuka, who themselves expressed a desire to expand their partnership with our institution. This coincides with the company looking to expand its commercial operations in Europe. Uking Terbuka, incidentally, is one of the ten largest companies in Indonesia and now operates subsidiaries throughout South-East Asia and, crucially, in China. The original owners of Uking Terbuka, incidentally, were ethnically Chinese, though they now identify solidly with Indonesian Muslim culture. The company, however, also wants to expand in China and, given that the company has no language barriers to its participation and also given that the owners retain significant links with the coastal region of the mainland where the owning family originated, we expect the company will soon achieve its objective of establishing a significant presence in China.

Partnerships between higher education institutions and private corporations are not new. This particular partnership would, however, pose a few problems. This would be a partnership across two countries, where the prime interest of both parties lay in a third. For Uking Terbuka,

the partnership would be primarily a commercial venture. But perhaps the most important consideration is that we have no information at present on what level of participation in the institutional management the company might desire. This is not a warning, merely a declaration of ignorance and a focus for further evaluation.

An option

Initial consultation with Uking Terbuka has identified a possible strategy for future cooperation. The company's main future interest in this country is in property investment and in London we possess one of the most vibrant property markets in the world. Uking Terbuka has already expressed its desire to expand its presence in London but has thus far not identified specific sites of interest.

What is proposed, therefore, is an integrated joint project that would involve Hackney Metro concentrating its initial recruitment drive in China in the same region that Uking Terbuka is developing its own partnership. If this recruitment were to go well, the Uking company would build accommodation blocks that would charge commercial rents to their occupants but would provide initial discounts for those Chinese students who were also attending Hackney Metro. Detailed breakdowns of projected numbers of students, their costs and Uking's interests are included in the annexe.

Of course, the company will be trying to operate commercially, trying to make a profit

from their investment. This is not dissimilar to the current motives of Hackney Metro, with the crucial difference that we have neither owners nor shareholders, and, therefore, do not seek profit for commercial investors, merely income to secure our institutional survival. We have included the full text of the proposed memorandum of understanding between Hackney Metro and Uking Terbuka and we encourage staff to support the initiative.

Signed
Professor Jane Scrivener, education
Dr. Gemma Pitcairn, social sciences
Dr. Priantha Perswandar, public policy
Dr. Michael Adefolu, administration
Cc Daisy Johnson, member of London Assembly
15 June 2011

Family discussion

I have decided to record Edward and Gemma Pitcairn's crucial discussion as a narrative with commentary. Though we are used to such form - after all it is the basis of most fiction - we must bear in mind when reading such a text that, although the reported words of Edward and Gemma are verbatim, the commentary remains a third-party interpretation. In places this observer's commentary must intrude to become the content, itself. Throughout the following, however, the separation of the dialogue from the commentary must remain a constant activity for the reader. The dialogue's participants, of course, are speaking their minds, but the commentary is wholly my perspective. The reader is encouraged at any stage to disassemble the presented elements in order to create his or her own interpretation.

It was a Thursday morning, a full two days after Edward Pitcairn's appointment with his doctor. Gemma had planned several days working from home, as had become her habit during the pandemic, time when she generally worked for ten hours or more each day at her computer creating online teaching materials for future use in the university. She had hoped that Edward might talk with her on the Wednesday, the day after his consultation. Edward, however, had declared that previous morning that he wanted to work all day and had stayed in his room. He had eaten nothing all day, taking only water from the bathroom on the floor below his top floor room.

On the Thursday, Gemma had begun the day by taking her father a breakfast of soup noodles, topped with chopped fresh green chillies she had specially bought from the deli on Upper Street the evening before. At six-thirty, she had found him already awake, showered, dressed and at his desk, working, she presumed, on a paper.

"I brought you breakfast, dad." He nodded his thanks, looking up with an almost embarrassed glance. "You are working too hard… You shouldn't…"

"I need to finish this," he said. "It's the first thing of any substance I have put together for some time. I seem to have spent the last decade shifting dirt with a toothbrush, so much so that I have forgotten how to write. And what about my quarantine? You have come into the room…"

"Screw the quarantine. It's been nearly a week. And you already blew that by doing a walkabout after your appointment."

Gemma paused and then decided she had to act. "We should talk this morning. Have your breakfast and then..."

"I'll come down. I need to get out of this room, if it's all right with you. I assume you're going to be in the study?" His daughter nodded. He caught the smell of the chillies. "Wow! Now you're talking!"

Some weeks before, Gemma had undertaken the task of transferring her entire second year course on Culture, Media and Politics into a series of electronic resources. This had involved her in several extended video projects, where her intention was to record all of her planned

sequence of eight lectures, which would then be uploaded for student access. On starting the project, however, Gemma had realised that her text could also do with an update, so she had embarked upon a literature review, which had meant accessing hundreds of recently published academic journal papers, four or five on each point her lecture might present. Online access to the university library had been a godsend, if she could have brought herself to use such a word, but everything had to read on screen, which she found tiring. The exercise had thus turned into a mammoth research project. After several weeks of intense work, after having accessed the Jstor journal archive for upwards of five hours a day, she still had not yet completed half of her original task.

To assist, Elsie, with Geoff's help, had adapted the basement study that her mother had used for years into a blacked-out video production studio, complete with curtains and screens to reduce the sound reverberation of the space effectively to zero. On re-entering her workspace, Gemma mumbled to herself that the adaptation might have been a tad premature. The recording studio was utterly necessary for the actual video recording but, during the rest of her working time, the vast majority in fact, she was effectively living in total darkness, save for a spotlight over her keyboard. It was a practice that, alongside the restricted movement and limited social contact imposed by Covid lockdowns had intensified her feelings of isolation. Life seemed to have become something of a dedicated

absurdity, a constant labour on behalf of people she could not meet, a constant analysis of a world outside, interaction with which was denied her

The fact that Gemma and Edward chose to talk in the basement was fortuitous, however, because the space had the effect of producing a perfect record of the conversation, fortuitously assembled under studio conditions. Throughout this record, there is no ambiguity whatsoever. What is reported here was said, verbatim. Their presence in the studio also facilitated the video record, since the camera set up to record Gemma's lecture could be accessed remotely. The video record is not quite complete, however, since the placement of screens and curtains to enhance the audio quality of Gemma's recordings did obscure some of the facilities that had been installed earlier. Because of Gemma's daily occupancy of the room, there had arisen no suitable opportunity to correct this detail.

Gemma settled down to work and was grappling with an impenetrable paper on the necessity of intellectual conflict inevitably created by Derrida's post-structural deconstruction of the concept of popularity, or otherwise, when applied to the notion of 'popular' art, especially music. The paper examined, philosophically, the nature of the ownership of the concept 'popular' from the point of view that the label identified a particular genre, a populist and thus a political proposition, rather than an achieved state. Intellectually, she had spent many hours, probably years, grappling with the attraction of this analysis of interests which

suggested the powerful will always seek to control, but, as someone who ultimately believed in respect for people and their good nature, she found herself confused as to why so many could be so easily fooled. False consciousness was not a concept that allowed her to sleep at night.

Edward came down the stairs with his trademark flatfoot clatter just after seven thirty. Elsie had already left for work, since she was involved all week in production work at a location out of London and Geoff had also, of course, already set off for the office. Father and daughter knew, therefore, that they were alone in the house, so we may assume they had no reason to hold back on anything they might say.

“Sorry, Gem… Am I disturbing…”

“It’s a great tactic to enquire about a deed that’s already done. I’m sorry… I was bang in the middle of penetrating the impenetrable, denying the undeniable, cavorting with the uncavortable…”

“Contemporary French sociology, by any chance…?”

“Spot on. How on earth did you know?”

“Force of habit, I suppose…” He laughed and so did his daughter. For these two academics, it was a joke like two mathematicians might share about the sum of two and two.

Edward smiled. “Sociologist daughters...”

“Sociologist daughter excavates archaeologist father. It sounds just like a headline from the Sun.”

“More like Angler’s Weekly...” Edward said, trying to match her for irony. He opted for a

diversion. “Many years ago, I came across a headline quite by chance in a copy of Angler’s Weekly, when I knocked a copy of the magazine off the rack in our library at college. I was reaching for The Listener, I recall. The magazine fell open at an inside page and I read the large print headline, ‘Is a bloodworm ban logical?’. It was an experience that somehow lodged in my mind to such an extent that I have never forgotten the line. It was over forty years ago, but the memory has proved indelible. It’s strange how the random can intrude uninvited into the permanence of life.”

“A bit like a virus… Tell Derrida,” Gemma said.

“I brought this,” he said, handing over the single sheet summary he had himself handwritten from his medical consultation forty-eight hours before. “I thought I might be a good place to start.” His voice, hardly changed, offered those miniscule but definitive stops that locate the serious.

There followed approximately three minutes of near silence. Gemma made a noise or two, a grunt, a sharply taken breath, a hint of a resigned sigh. She finished reading and immediately turned over the sheet to start again, apologizing and stating what she was doing. In total, she read the document three times, by which time she had already committed much of its content to quotable memory.

She placed the sheet on the table by her keyboard and initially did not look at her father. She closed her eyes and took a couple of deep breaths. She then burst into tears and turned to

embrace him. For several minutes, she sobbed uncontrollably, her face buried into her father's chest so she could feel the living tickle of his beard on her cheek as her body convulsed.

It was an experience that returned her momentarily to childhood when the sensation of bristle on skin reassured a little girl of the father's presence, the father's care, the father's singularity, the father's permanence. For this short time, the reflex ruled both body and mind.

Clearly also recalling behaviours from almost fifty years earlier, Edward said precisely nothing. He made not a single sound as he stroked his daughter's back with his right hand. For just a moment, she was again an infant in her father's comfort, a child for whom life had presented an insurmountable challenge, a child for whom a parent's protection would temporarily exclude an intruding reality. They separated, shared tears still flowing.

There was a box of tissues on her desk. She took a few to blow her nose and wipe her eyes, their dampened mass then screwed up in her hand and grasped rather than discarded, though the large and empty waste bin was next to her chair. She continued to roll the damp tissues, repeatedly compressing the paper mass as she spoke.

"Dad…"

"For now, at least."

"I assume there is some treatment that might help?" Her tone assumed that there would be.

"There will be no treatment, Gem. I am absolutely clear about that." Edward paused to

allow his words to register. “I have spent my life digging around in the remains of human lives. Personally, I do not want to become someone else’s research project for at least ten thousand years, and then only in the form of ashes.”

“So, you are just going to accept what this says?” Gemma nodded at the sheet now lying on her desk, her gesture almost suggesting that it might never have existed, at least that its content might remain negotiable.

“Have I a choice? It’s pretty explicit, Gem. It says I have advanced pancreatic cancer that has already spread to other organs. We are talking weeks, if that.” Edward’s outstretched arms were now holding his daughter’s upper arms, his limbs extended as if to say to the child he was addressing that she would soon have to cope with this new reality in her own way and alone. For a short time, he was again the parent. “It has always seemed to me that we live our active lives in a state of assumed wellbeing and at least potential self-sufficiency. We can cope. We never admit real weakness and though we allow thought of serious illness to enter our consciousness, we regard every illness as treatable, every problem as solvable. What we never do is place ourselves in the mental state where we, ourselves, alone, have no control over an outcome. Until that moment arises, that moment when it is taken forever out of our hands… Then it takes over, dictates to us, denies us even a say in our own future. In the past, when that coping came to an end, we simply died. Now, when we fall ill, we become someone’s research

project, eventually merely evidence for a statistical proof or denial of a thesis. It may well be that the overall process does benefit other people, but I just do not want to participate in a research project where I am not the director. You know I've always been a control freak... There will be no treatment. I don't want an extra few weeks if those weeks are in hospital puking and shitting my samples into someone's database. I am going to accept the diagnosis as final and let things happen. Doctor Khan doubted that I would live beyond a few weeks."

Gemma was again close to tears. "A few weeks... A few more... A few more again. How long is the piece of string?"

"Don't try to raise your hopes, Gem. There's no ambiguity here. I can feel the changes in myself. I get tired when I do things. I have to sit to recuperate. Sometimes I just end up sitting for longer, because I don't feel any better. I used to discipline my body. My brain used to repeat something like, 'Don't be so stupid' to my muscles and I always used to be able to carry on. But it doesn't seem to work anymore. There will soon come a time when I can't make myself feel better, when I will take to my bed and I will never get up. If morphine is an option, I'll have it."

Father and daughter spent several minutes in shared silence. Throughout, Gemma was trying to suppress the tears that constantly welled in her visibly shaking body. She was consciously trying to breathe longer and deeper as time passed, obviously trying to recall the techniques she had learned in her yoga classes, sessions that

suddenly seemed rendered dysfunctional. Father and daughter did not look at one another but stared mutually into private infinities that shared no common territory. It was Edward who spoke at last.

“I spent all day yesterday going through the details. I made a list…”

“I’ve heard that one before…”

“I made another of my famous lists - and there aren’t going to be many more - detailing all the bank accounts, investments, assets, pensions, all the things to do with money, credit cards et cetera… I’ve listed them all and got new balances and values for all of them. I have put contact numbers for recording my death on the same document, along with usernames and passwords for the online access. I have even drafted a standard letter that you can send to any relevant recipient. I’ve sent you the documents as attachments to your email. All you will need to do is fill in a date and attach the death certificate.”

“It’s almost as if it’s already happened…”

“I can assure you it hasn’t… Yet… But it will.”

“Are you in pain?”

“Absolutely not. Well, there are some cramps around my middle at times, but it’s nothing… a bit like indigestion. But the rest… All I can sense is this growing tiredness. It is getting worse. Just a week ago, I was rushing up the escalator from the tube…”

“You know people move faster if everyone just rides the escalator?”

“Only at times of maximal use, darling. There was hardly anyone else around when I sprang up the moving stairs.”

“You always liked using that term, moving stairs. I remember when we used to go shopping on Oxford Street when I was a kid…”

“And that would not have been often… I used to hate the experience.”

“Let’s take the moving stairs to the toy department… You used to say that to mum when we were in Debenhams. Why were they moving stairs? Why not ‘escalator’?”

“It was political, Gem.” The incongruity raised a laugh. “Harold Wilson used to talk about the Vietnam War. He was always on about why we should not see an escalation in the conflict, as if escalators never went down. ‘Moving stairs’ arose out of my and your mom’s contempt for what we saw as the Labour Government’s refusal to condemn the war, let alone institute socialist policies. It was really a euphemism for ‘Isn’t Harold Wilson a shit’. It’s what it felt like at the time. I would give almost anything to have him back now.”

Gemma’s affectionate smile faded only after a full minute of silently shared memory. “It all seems so pointless now…”

“It was pointless then, Gem. Our problem in the sixties was that we were convinced by the illusion, later delusion that we actually had the opportunity and the power to change things. By the time you came along and we were shopping in the late seventies and eighties, we spoke about our youthful idealistic concerns only in code and

‘moving stairs’ had become one of our shared summary terms. We used to say, ‘Great Leap Forward’ with the same defeatism, usually when we crossed the road.”

“Life is a complicated thing, isn’t it?”

“Only if you complicate it. Your mom and I were a happy pair. We supported one another. We were happy. We had a beautiful and talented daughter. We had the house by then,” he said, casting a momentary glance at the walls and ceiling. Edward and Penny Pitcairn, of course, inherited the property from Penny’s parents, who officially lived there until their deaths, just three months apart. Both had in fact died in this house, despite having spent most of their last years in their Gloucestershire cottage. It had seemed at the time that both needed to end their lives within reassuring surroundings that reminded them of happiness, family, stability. “Your mum and I both had mildly successful careers, which we also found fulfilling... We can’t grumble. But, like all good things, it comes to an end.”

“...domestic bliss is my heritage... And then I fucked it up...” The heavy irony in her voice was surreal. The first phrase was clearly something of a dig at her father’s assessment of their family life, which was partial, idealised and barely accurate, if not absolute fiction, while the second admitted no personal responsibility whatsoever for her own disasters.

“You did nothing of the sort, Gem. You did what you wanted with your life, that’s all. You made your own way, decided things for yourself. You studied what you wanted, took the courses

that interested you, made a success of the career you chose. You met a bloke, fell in love and had a perfectly good family life with your own beautiful and talented daughter. It was not your fault that John fell victim to the real disease of the age, self-delusion."

"Self-delusion...that's the best euphemism I have ever heard for fucking a younger woman."

Edward smiled a loving smile. "Beautifully put...as ever…"

"Sociologists aren't usually that direct or explicit, I have to admit. We tend to look for the complications, the counter-intuitive, the classifiable, especially when we can attach our own name to the system. Just imagine the Pitcairn Scale of matrimonial disloyalty, Level One the wandering eye, Level Two the clandestine meeting, Level Three the actual fuck. I wonder how many phenomenological studies I might need to conclude that only Level Three counts?"

"Well, that's all behind you now. Don't dwell on the past…"

"Says the archaeologist!"

Edward smiled. "But that is where it is - in the past. You have your career, a house, a wonderful daughter, a partner... There's a lot of people who don't have all that."

Gemma did not speak, clearly preferring the silence to carry her meaning, which obviously related to his reference to 'a partner'. Throughout, she stared directly at her father, her manner trying to communicate that she would give up everything if it would make him better.

Edward, however, misinterpreted. He believed her pause was born of an inability to continue beyond that loaded word he had just uttered.

"You've been with Geoff for…five years, is that right?"

"About... On and off, sometimes more off than on. It started just as Elsie was finishing her degree. And the 'together' only applies part time. And, really, he's only been around the house regularly for about two years, so he's still quite new."

Edward's gaze expressed without words how little he trusted the man. Gemma's also silent reply clearly agreed with the assessment, but also bore an expression that said, "But what do you expect me to do?"

"How did you meet? I'm sure you have told me, but I have clearly forgotten."

"There's no particular reason I would have told you, I suppose. We met at a Brexit meeting."

Edward laughed. "Sounds romantic…"

"It wasn't anything of the sort. I was in the Labour Party at the time and got heavily involved in the Remain campaign in this area. We did a number of meetings and invited several speakers, some of them quite high profile. After all, we are on Jeremy's patch, aren't we?" Gemma's voice rather tailed off here, despite her claims of proximity to power.

Edward smiled, ruefully, raised his eyebrows and said, "Brexit… I bet he helped."

Gemma laughed. "Not exactly. There's nothing like a lukewarm endorsement, but we did become something of a focus for the media. We had

several people do television nearby. There was a lot to do and Geoff was one of the people who volunteered to help. We seemed to get closer as the weeks passed and by the end the only Remain left was the relationship we had started by chance. It remained, so to speak."

"…but you only meet occasionally, I think…"

"Yes, only when I need a fling…"

"Euphemisms, euphemisms…"

"I think such things often do get the better of our judgment, Dad. In your case, I think it was often a lack of judgment that so often led to…a conclusion."

He smiled. "What was I just saying about euphemisms? I never tried to hide anything…"

"But then, you were never, shall we say, explicit about such things, were you?

"Your mum and I had an understanding…"

"Lots of women understand the same thing, Dad."

"Are you happy?" It was not intended to sound like a non-sequitur.

Gemma shrugged. "That's such a loaded question… Am I happy?" There was a deep and exaggerated intake of breath, and then an even more exaggerated sigh. "I've no idea. I'm not even sure what happiness is anymore. Like most people, I feel only a sense of defeat."

The moment Gemma had uttered the words it was clear that she regretted them. She had just been told by her father that his life would imminently come to an end, and here was she, apparently unwilling to grasp her own future, a future that was not under any threat, except by

her own willing hand. “I’m sorry, dad... I didn’t mean to...”

Edward interrupted. “It was a genuine question, Gem. It’s just that... Well, to be frank... Geoff seems an odd sort to me. He has a low status, pretty low paid job. He seems to want to appear non-intellectual, but I have the feeling that he is aware of everything, but he is unwilling to offer opinion, unwilling even to engage in discussion. To me, he always stays consciously aloof. He is the sort of person whose demeanour, expression, manner hardly ever seems to change. He’s always there, but he seems to want to be somehow detached. And then on some things, he is suddenly right in there, full of facts, aware of current thinking and ready to say what he thinks. At least that’s what comes across to me, even though he rarely offers anything. And yet he seems completely committed to things he rarely even talks about.”

“You mean on environmental issues.”

“Obviously. He often seems to be more radical even than Elsie.”

“It’s the passion of the age. The only reason why they don’t burn witches is the CO2 emission.”

He smiled. “Where does he work? Have you ever been there?”

“It’s just a benefit office. It’s near the Angel. He walks there. Says it keeps him fit. He has one of those pace counter apps on his phone. He says he needs his six thousand steps a day and he does more than that to the office and back. It’s over seven hundred just to the station.”

“You’ve counted it?”

“I always did. Don’t you remember? And I still try to avoid treading on the cracks between the paving stones.”

“Do you still drive to work, or do you use public transport? Do you ever leave the house with him, walk to the station, take the train…?”

“Dad, we’ve been in a pandemic for over a year. I’ve hardly been to college. I’ve done barely a few days in my office in over a year. We Zoom everything, which is unfortunate, because I have to spend half my time tidying the house to keep the background orderly. It seems to me that people on Zoom spend most of the call scrutinizing and identifying everything in your room. They know the brand of coffee you drink, the titles of the books on your shelves and whether any of them have moved since the last call. At least with Zoom you have to schedule things, but with WhatsApp running half the day as well, you never know when someone might connect for whatever reason. I was in the loo last time the boss called. And I was even looking at the phone when it rang. I took the call sitting there.”

“But normally, you would drive to work?”

“Or take the bus. I can get a 30 from the Corner and then a 26 gets me the last bit, or I can even walk.”

“But you’ve not been using the bus since the pandemic broke.”

“Very few people have.”

Edward was again silent for a while. He was clearly intent on probing. “Where’s he from? Geoff, I mean…”

“South London. Wandsworth, East Putney area.”

“And what about education?”

“State school. None of your upper-class airs and graces with him. Comprehensive he was and comprehensive he is.”

“So, he went to Elliott?”

“I’ve no idea. Is that a school?”

“It was. The school is still there, but it changed its name a decade ago. How old is Geoff?”

“Thirty-eight, thirty-seven. His birthday is next week.”

“Speaking of people who take up with younger partners…”

“Dad! That’s cruel! I didn’t…”

“I’m only joking, Gem. So Geoff would have been in secondary school through the later part of the nineties.”

“That didn’t sound like a question.”

“It wasn’t. It’s inevitable.”

“Why all this interest in Geoff? What’s he done? Has he said something to you?”

Edward laughed. “I wish he had. He seems to offer me only a wall of unchanging mild interest. And it’s a disinterest I find far from convincing.”

What Edward did not say to Gemma was that he had reasons for his questions. Two days before, still in the daze that had enveloped him so suddenly during his meeting with Doctor Khan, Edward had decided to walk. Privately, it was an act of defiance. He had been told his time was

short and that an overwhelming tiredness would soon render him inactive. A walk just might prove them all wrong. So, he set off at pace after his consultation. He had said his own “Screw quarantine” before he set off. He paid off the taxi driver, who was still waiting and then wandered.

He probably needed some space to think and reflect, to decide if, when and how he might tell his daughter that he would soon die. He had walked from the hospital heading south and east. As the streets offered their junctions, he chose his route at random. Of course, he knew most of the area so nothing was unfamiliar and there was no chance he might get lost, but he clearly just wanted to amble here and there, probably to mull over the devastating news he had just been given. He was feeling tired before long and paused on a bench in Bedford Square to muse, staring at the publishers’ offices that occupied the Georgian terraces, imagining perhaps that in a different life, he might have done business with them rather than with the editors of academic journals. He meandered the streets again and then paused on another bench in Russell Square, this time longer than before and then finally slumping to rest under full shade in Coram’s Fields, where he sat for half an hour and dozed off. He had done too much.

He woke around midday, having been in full sun for a while. He was uncomfortably hot, and his first thought was to retrieve his hat from the hold-all he had brought. He made as if to stand and then did not, having suddenly recognised two people sitting on a bench nearby, near enough for

recognition, apparently in one direction only. He put on his hat but placed its string strap at the back of his neck and then pulled the hat forward off his head, so it obscured his beard, his one truly recognisable feature. He feigned the kind of doze one might expect from a recent dental patient.

One of the pair on the nearby seat was Geoff. The other Edward Pitcairn also recognised immediately, since it was a well-known television presenter and journalist. Edward paused and continued to observe, obviously sure that Geoff had not noticed him. It is absolutely certain that Edward Pitcairn noticed that it was Geoff who was being interviewed by the familiar woman, who continued to make notes while Edward watched. Their conversation lasted for a further ten minutes, during which time Edward Pitcairn continued to watch and to take note. He was, it must be recorded, well out of hearing range, though close enough for Geoff to have noticed him, if he had been on top of his job, which he clearly was not. After another five minutes, the pair on the bench stood, and started to head for the exit. Edward himself rose and ambled off in the general direction of St Pancras, a station he had habitually referred to as St Pancreas, but not today. His observed pair had departed a minute before and he had resolved to follow, but man and woman went their different ways along Mecklenburgh Street. In any case, Edward was never going to keep pace.

“So,” Edward continued to Gemma, “Geoff has absolutely nothing to do with the media? He is just a benefits clerk?”

Gemma was mildly confused, though not at all worried. “Why do you ask?”

Edward shrugged. “Just a question.”

“If you have any questions about media people, then Elsie is the one to ask. She seems to rub shoulders with well-connected people all the time. Whether she gets close is another matter. Whether anyone gets close to such people is a question that could occupy a sociologist’s career! I’m absolutely sure that Geoff doesn’t even have an interest in the media. Whenever Elsie talks about her work, Geoff doesn’t seem to be the slightest bit interested. It’s almost as if…”

“…he feigns disinterest?”

Gemma hesitated. “Now there’s a choice of words…” She clearly remembered her father’s previous use of the term to describe Geoff’s manner.

The sound of a toilet flushing on the floor above told them they were not, as they had thought, alone in the house. Gemma stood up from her desk and took the three steps needed to reach the base of the stairs from the ground floor. The staircase turned a right angle at the bottom, the last two stairs protruding not to the floor space. It was on the upper of the two that she stood to peer upwards and call, “Hello…”

It was Geoff’s voice that answered. “Sorry, Gemma, I had to come home for some papers I left behind this morning. I thought I didn’t need the file today and I did.” By the time he had

finished his sentence, he had descended the stairs and was standing on the staircase two steps above Gemma. He leaned forward and gave the top of her head a little kiss. “And there was a giant floater in the loo!” He was about to laugh when Edward spoke.

“Apparently it’s one of the symptoms.”

Geoff looked confused. “Symptoms?”

“Edward has pancreatic cancer, Geoff. It was confirmed the day before yesterday. The regular medical check was not quite regular this year.”

Geoff and Gemma both stepped away from the stairs and turned to face Edward, a move that left him sensing that he was being cast as a guilty party. “What sort of treatment will you have?”

“There will be no treatment. It’s terminal.” There was a lengthy pause. As ever, Geoff did not appear to be shocked. Nothing ever did shock him, it seemed. “I have things to finish,” Edward announced. “I’ll catch up with you later,” he said, starting to climb the stairs.

As the sound of his footfall began to fade towards an upper floor, Gemma said, “He is getting noticeably slower.”

“He is seventy-three.”

“And he won’t make seventy-four.”

Public meeting

A public meeting took place on Tuesday, 14 May 2020 in Western Way Road Community Centre. It was called by Off Uking Palace (OUP), a loose alliance of environmental and political groups that has joined forces to oppose the Uking company's construction project in Hackney. A list of attendees at the gathering can be supplied on request but is available from the OUP Campaign page on our website via a secure login. Please access this site only from hardware that has been specifically identified for access or a security breach will be recorded, which may result in disciplinary action.

Details of the project are obviously available on the website, but for the purposes of this report I will offer a brief summary of where we stood at the time of this meeting. Uking Terbuka, an Indonesian multinational, purchased a tranche of Hackney Marshes some years ago, stating initially that the company desired only to secure a land holding in London with a view, possibly, to developing it in the future. It was clear throughout that the company would eventually seek to develop the site, but there were no immediate plans and, indeed, details did not emerge for two years.

There followed several media reports and other rumours that the company was planning various projects, including private housing, a shopping centre, an entertainment complex and finally an events venue. Then, about two and a half years ago, Uking Terbuka lodged an application to

build a student accommodation development. The proposal was originally for four twelve storey blocks with associated facilities, access and landscaping, with each block housing forty-four one-bedroom apartments. The ground floor of each block would be dedicated to shared study rooms and communal lounges. The blocks were to occupy half of the land area, with the other half devoted to a low-rise commerce park with car parking. A year after placing this application, the company modified its plans after announcing it had secured another adjoining tract of land, though no commercial purchase seemed to have been made. This particular plot was a disused sports facility, originally part of a municipal facility. The revised plans retained the retail park, but the number of blocks doubled to eight and the height of each was increased to sixteen storeys. This would result in there being over five hundred apartments on the site and some local opposition emerged. This opposition has both intensified and widened, with the Uking Palace development now threatening to become a national political issue.

The company’s plan was always to provide accommodation for overseas students studying primarily at the Hackney Metro University, though not exclusively. Their prime audience was not Indonesian students, as might have been expected, but Chinese. When details of the rents to be charged to occupants of the block were published, there was more disquiet in the community, since the development was judged to have taken on the character of a luxury facility

aimed exclusively at students from rich Chinese families. It must be noted that Uking Terbuka is an Indonesian company, but the ownership is still concentrated within the wider Sarnu family, who were until relatively recently ethnically Chinese and Buddhist, having only adopted Islam and Bahasa Indonesia names just a generation ago. The family business emerged from a successful Javanese trading firm that the family had operated for several generations. After the purges of the sixties, a young, United States-educated sub-group of the family took control of the company and expanded the enterprise, both intensifying and broadening its interests. The company grew remarkably quickly, initially on the back of participation in state-sponsored projects, and then expanded beyond its national borders into South-East Asia. It entered the national top ten companies by turnover in the nineties and is now a multinational conglomerate, with interests throughout Asia, Europe and North America, specialising in property ownership and management, but also having interests in finance, hotels, leisure, shipping and food.

Ill feeling towards the Uking Palace project in Hackney grew when it was revealed that the second phase of the proposed development may have been facilitated by political, rather than commercial relationships. When it emerged that Uking executives had paid large sums to set up photo opportunities for publicity purposes outside of the United Kingdom, there was initially a newspaper investigation and then a short television programme produced by investigative

journalists. These alleged that Uking Terbuka executives were buying commercial favours via political donations. Serious opinion dismissed the claims as ‘socialist propaganda’, a ministerial statement was made, and the issue went to court. The case was dropped when some culpability was accepted and a statement along the lines of “we must make sure to learn lessons to ensure such things do not happen again in the future” took the heat out of the issue. Planning for the project continued.

A second public exposé followed the release of information suggesting that the second land acquisition by Uking had been facilitated at the ministerial level and had come about as a result of several significant donations to a particular political party. In addition, it was suggested but never demonstrated, let alone proved, that bribes had been paid into the accounts of offshore companies based in the Caribbean, whose ownership has been linked to prominent public figures. The interests of the local authority appear not to have been considered and there was no record of consultation with the council, though when questioned council officers admitted they were aware of the project. They claimed to have no powers to intervene, a claim that was subsequently shown to be wrong.

Further briefings have suggested that the transfer was quite legal but was facilitated by an amendment to an otherwise unrelated act of parliament, which had been aimed primarily at increasing the general amount of land available for development by relaxing some planning rules.

The technical mechanism for bringing this about had been to table an amendment aimed specifically at redefining the use of under-used sports facilities in areas where alternative facilities were available. The specific site in Hackney was not mentioned in the parliamentary proceedings, but the week after the bill was passed, Uking reported that the second land transfer had happened. The planning application was amended just a month later, with the revised project appearing to have been completed at the same time as the original plans, indicating to some that the company had considered these new proposals as a done deal from the project's inception.

Community action against the project had begun soon after the announcement of the first planning application. An alliance of several groups was created, but the principal actors were GASSED, Green Areas Support Sustainable Environmental Development, and PAR, Proletariat Against Racism. The latter group, of course, we know well after many years of our interest in them. As ever, their interest in this project stemmed less from environmental concerns and more from PAR's usual approach to 'community' involvement, which is recruiting members into their own networks and engaging generally in what used to be called 'agitprop'. As we know, the ten per cent levy on gross earnings donated to the group by its members does not feature in their literature.

GASSED, on the other hand, was new to us. It seems to have emerged out of a recent alliance

between the radical Green Action Group and newly formed AIR, Atmosphere Is Religion, which has launched several local campaigns around the issue of air quality in cities in different parts of the country. Many of the group's local organisations, usually those based near older industrial cities, however, focus on air travel and road transport. The campaigns do not seem to be coordinated in any way and differ significantly from area to area, some of them radical, while others go no further than flyposting.

GASSED's prime activist on the Uking Palace issue was soon identified as Elsie Harness (now known as Elsie Pitcairn), daughter of Gemma Harness (also now Pitcairn), an employee of Hackney Metro University in the Humanities and Social Studies Faculty. Again, Gemma Harness has been monitored for some time after her research on the possible illegality of the Iraq War and then for her high-profile campaigning around Brexit. Her daughter, Elsie, was just twenty-two when the opposition alliance was formed. She was then a newly graduated MA in Media Studies and, in the three years since then, Elsie Pitcairn has pursued a highly successful career in a television and film production company and so has access to significant media personalities. There is evidence that she has also expended considerable energy in recruiting media people into the campaign against Uking Palace. There exist significant links between Elsie Pitcairn and those responsible for the media exposé of the links to Caribbean-based shell companies mentioned earlier.

The following report from an officer who attended the meeting in question will set down the parameters for our decisions. The presence of an officer at this meeting is, of course, confidential and must not be revealed to anyone other than colleagues.

...

I attended the meeting in Western Way Road last week. Date, time and location details are available on the audio recording of proceedings. It was not appropriate to use video at this meeting, but I did leave the mobile's audio record and transmit facility open throughout. Since the verbatim record exists, I will include here only some of the more interesting contributions, alongside some contextual observations of my own. Elsie Pitcairn began the proceedings and she set the meeting's tone with her opening.

EP - Welcome everybody to this Off Uking Palace meeting. Can we start with a few choruses?

There were cheers before a full minute of Off Uking Palace, Off Uking Palace... Elsie led the chant via her microphone, which was at heightened volume throughout. After she raised her hand to ask for the chanting to stop, the volume was decreased again by the sound controller.

EP - Tonight we have a few new faces from Brent (cheers), from Stratford (cheers), from Tottenham (boos, followed by laughter) and from Tower Hamlets (loud cheers). I am joined on the platform by three speakers tonight. Daisy Johnson (applause) is from the East London

Against Racism campaign, a group assisting Windrush generation victims. Alex Taub (a single clap) is here to represent... well, himself, really. Alex is doing a study on migrating for education and is going to profile the target group who might become residents of Uking Palace. He will conclude that they do not represent a cross section of the education migration population, thus illustrating that Uking Palace is more about elite residence than student accommodation (some applause). And finally, there is our old friend, Farida Al Hashemy of GASSED who is going to give a general update of where the campaign has reached (applause). In fact, I am going to stand aside and ask Farida to start us off. (Elsie Pitcairn let the final word rise rather than fall, prompting the audience to follow her lead. There followed immediate shouts of "Off Uking Palace" following the use of the buzzword.)

Farida Al Hashemy took the microphone and began her update of recent developments. These will be listed in summary form only, since they are available elsewhere. It is worth our while to remind ourselves of where the speaker needs to be placed in the overall discussion. Farida Al Hashemy is Palestinian, a naturalized British citizen. She is sixty-three years old and was almost ten when her family fled the Middle East during the 1967 war. Her father, Marwan, had been a British Council employee and was granted special status to bring his family to settle in the UK after the area of the West Bank where they lived became a battleground. They fled into Jordan and were granted the right to travel to UK

almost immediately. Marwan Al Hashemy was accompanied by his wife, Nour, and their two children, Farida (ten) and Latifa (six). Marwan died in 1987 and Nour survived him until 1998. They had both been active in Middle Eastern political groups in north London, Nour especially so, sharing speaking platforms with a number of people of interest to us. There are full details on our database.

But what is currently still contentious information is that Latifa's son, Farida's nephew, Jihad, has apparently lived up to his name. He is reported to have joined ISIS via the Turkey route in 2015. Then aged twenty, he certainly disappeared from his college course in Business and Marketing at Hackney Metro (2014 intake) and he certainly travelled to Istanbul in May 2015. The last information we have on him relates to his paying his hotel bill for a three-night stay using his own credit card. From that day, he seems to have adopted a completely new identity, accessing none of his previous identity-confirming devices or facilities. There are neither financial transactions in his name nor electronic device locators to indicate his whereabouts since May 17, 2015. We have a possible match, though the likelihood of exactness is low (less than ten percent) relating to a conversation recorded by the resident management systems of a taxi in eastern Turkey on 20 May 2015, just three days later. The conversation was being monitored in real time by the local security forces, because they were engaged in detailed monitoring of another of the taxi's occupants, who was clearly

the person sitting in the front seat next to the driver. Turkish Intelligence have not revealed the identity of their individual of interest, though our website indicates that we may know the person concerned. For details, please access the link located on Jihad Al Hashemy's page. And, if anyone has evidence of prior links between this individual of interest and Jihad Al Hashemy, please notify your superior, and please do include details of any third-party passing contacts on whom you have information. There were eight passengers in the taxi. The monitored subject did most of the talking and two other passengers, both of whom, it has been established, were traveling to the Syrian border to join ISIS, also made significant contributions. Their identities, which may be of interest, can also be accessed via the above-mentioned link.

The layout of the taxi was as normal for this model of vehicle, with two passengers in the front next to the driver and then two rows of three seats behind, with the third seat at the end of the middle row folding into the gap above the space for accessing the rear block after the other occupants had taken their seats. Because the vehicle was standard issue, in other words this was a covert operation conducted in a production vehicle without special modifications, the only voice recording that was clear came from the front two rows of seats. Added to that was the problem that the folding seat squeaked loudly at every bump in the ride and roads in eastern Turkey are not known for the integrity of their surface. As a consequence, we only have a record

of a few words spoken by our passenger of interest at the back and those were a shouted exclamation when the vehicle suffered a near miss while overtaking a truck. He was not silent during the journey, but the conversation at the rear of the taxi merely became uncleanable background noise on the recording. The voice match with Latifa's son, Jihad, is less than ten per cent confident, but it remains a possible link. The taxi, of course, was an on-demand service. The passengers paid in cash, so the driver kept no records of who was traveling that day. There have been subsequent reports that an individual with a good match to Jihad's features entered Afghanistan a few months ago, which would have meant he was at least five years in Syria, but the source of this recent information is not wholly trustworthy, and the identity match is at best circumstantial. This represents, however, the only lead we currently have relating to his whereabouts.

This is all quite circumstantial, of course, but the possibility remains that Farida Al Hashemy knows of her nephew's actions and whereabouts, though there exists no communication data to verify this. She, herself, however, has regularly flirted with organizations that would suggest sympathy with ISIS and radical extremism in general, though there are no open declarations from her to confirm that support. Farida, herself, is unmarried and has no children. In her own words, she has devoted her life to the Palestinian cause, and she describes herself as 'still fighting for her homeland'. GASSED and, via that

organisation, Off Uking Palace would appear, therefore, to be side-lines, perhaps vehicles to allow her to access publicity opportunities or even attract possible recruits to her other affiliations.

Farida Al Hashemy speaks with a strong Arabic-English accent, with many of the guttural vowel sounds of her native Arabic preserved.

FAH Hello everyone. Off Uking Palace (several chants subside quickly). We have some indications that there are now four members of the Planning Committee who are willing to speak against the Uking Palace application. This is progress, because up to now we have had only general messages of support. These are statements of opposition which are currently not published, but I understand that the individuals concerned are willing to talk to the media. Of course, whether the planning issue will be re-opened to allow these individuals to express their opposition is still not known. At the moment, the Government is blocking the reopening of the matter, saying that all due processes have been completed and there can be no justification for backtracking. As far as they are concerned, the project is now ready for implementation, which means the building can start. (Murmuring and boos.) We understand, however, that Uking, itself, is seeking a delay in the project. It may be that rumours of restrictions on the entry of foreign students might have caused some second thoughts on their behalf. Brexit, of course, and the general air of xenophobia that it represents, are both anathema to Uking's longer term aims,

but I am sure any delay will be short, given that this company has bought their way to the top repeatedly in the past. This project, of course, relies on the ability of foreign students to come to the UK without restriction, especially in the case of Uking Palace because we are of the opinion that it is just a cover for building what will eventually become privately-owned second homes for immigrants from China. The size of the one-bedroom apartments and their layout suggest strongly that they are designed so they can be adapted to two-bed with minimal change. Personally, I think that these statements by Uking are opinion management, designed to quieten the opposition while the project gets seriously underway. Once started, it would soon reach a point where it would be difficult to stop it.

The speaker paused here to reassemble her notes. She seemed to reject three or four documents from her original running order. It could be merely an indication of lack of preparation or time, but only enhanced imaging from a video record to establish the content of those documents can shed light on this. As previously stated, video was not an appropriate tool for this gathering, so if these documents are deemed of interest, they will have to be accessed by other means.

FAH We have written more letters to MPs. We have printed the text we sent at the bottom of the meeting leaflet, and they are on our OUP website. We have had replies, but only at the level of acknowledgement. There seems to be a veil of silence over the issue. Nobody wants to speak out

in public against this project, but equally nobody wants to be seen to support it either. Uking Palace seems to be progressing in spite of or perhaps because of everyone's apparent disinterest.

FAH We still can count on the support of Shamila Shah from the local Gazette, but she is finding it harder and harder to get her articles published. She thinks the editor is trying to gag her. She needs your support. Please can as many people as possible write to the Gazette asking for the paper to publish her articles on Uking? All that is needed is a short letter to the editor saying that you are interested in the project and that you are keen to hear the latest. You do not need to express any opinion. Let's make it a free speech issue, rather than a campaign. Of course, we know that not many people actually read the news coverage in the Gazette, but it is the existence of such an article in print that allowed us in the past to lever the subject into other media.

FAH Now I must raise the issue of coverage in the national press. Wendy Davis in The News has been taking an interest in the project ever since it became a campaign. Now I'm sure we all know where Wendy Davis is coming from. She is fiercely right-wing, rabidly pro-Brexit, libertarian and an ideological free trader, but of course she does not support a free market in labour, so opposes freedom of movement and indeed any aspect of labour rights legislation. Her support for Uking Palace is getting stronger and she has successfully raised the project's status via her

articles to the status of national political significance. She seems to be exceptionally well informed, to such an extent that she seems to have details of what the campaign is going to do before we have published anything ourselves! If anyone has anything on Wendy Davis, please share what you have with one of the participating groups via the email link on our website.

FAH And speaking of media, we had an interview with Radio Thames Flow just last week. The reporter contacted us having read one of Shamila's previous articles that we had lodged on the website. The interview was conducted at Uking's proposed site and was featured in the "About Town" programme at seven o'clock in the evening last Thursday. It was edited, of course, and the final article was only just over a minute, but it kept us on the map.

FAH That's about it, I'm afraid it's not much, but things will no doubt warm up if the construction work were to start. There would then be opportunities for direct action, which is always good for the media. Thanks.

There was applause, but it was muted. Elsie Pitcairn spoke again to introduce the next speaker, Alex Taub, the gist of whose presentation now follows. Alex Taub is a specialist in educational migration. He is a researcher and teacher at Hackney Metro, but spends most of his time doing field work, meaning that he is regularly away from his institution for more than half of the year. His specialism is Asia, hence his interest in Uking Palace, but he has done most of his work on

Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan and Filipino students. His interest in Chinese students really grew out of Hackney Metro's declared support of Uking Palace, so he has been researching the migration habits of Chinese students for only about two years. This is not mentioned here merely in passing. Taub's relative inexperience in the area ought to make it easy to find a more experienced researcher in the field, one with a different political stance from Taub, to refute his findings, should the need arise.

Alex Taub is also a socialist, undoubtedly sympathetic towards Trotskyite tactics. He is very much of the old guard Left, having had little to do with the environmentally focused groups of more recent years. In the past, he has not usually been involved in anything with an environmental or community focus, so Uking Palace might be a first for him on all fronts. But neither has he shied away from such issues, so his stance remains ambiguous. Our opinion on his involvement with the OUP campaign is that it stems from his albeit loose association with PAR. Our assessment is that this organization is a mere front for the more usual one we encounter so often in relation to 'direct action' campaigns. It is staffed by the same individuals who occupy known positions in the sister organisation, and it also appears to have similar membership rules. Documents seem to be shared across the two groups, with only headings changed. Details of Taub's past association with PAR's bigger and older sister organization can be found in Taub's

file on the website. Search on ‘Taub Hackney Metro affiliations’ to locate the record.

Taub spoke for twenty minutes. Since his presentation was just a summary of a published paper and included no new material, I will not include any verbatim quote from his speech. The whole article is published in the Spring issue of the Educational Migration Research Journal, VolXXIII No2, pp347-372, and can be accessed freely via Jstor. In summary, Alex Taub began by listing the increasing numbers of Chinese students in UK higher education. He then gave details of the fees paid and the impact these sums were having on the funding basis of many institutions. He looked at the average ratio of tuition fees to accommodation costs for foreign students across the whole sector and for China-recruited students in particular. He then contrasted that figure with the data relating to the Uking development, where the ratio of accommodation to tuition was significantly higher, an argument that he interpreted as revealing the elite bias of the development. He also looked at the proportion of China-recruited higher education students who stayed on in the UK after graduation and concluded that this proportion increased with the increased wealth and social class of the students themselves. His final point was that, given the elite profile of the students and the preferred ownership scheme rumoured to be associated with the Uking development, the project as a whole was being established as a means to promote residency, not short-term student accommodation. The rumour

that was being spread at this meeting, incidentally, was that Uking will offer its tenants the option of paying a higher rental rate during their studies in return for an option to buy an extended lease at a price set at the start of the tenancy, a lease that would transfer ownership for a fifteen-year period, longer for higher initial outlays. There has been no mention of such an arrangement from the company, incidentally. There was a high degree of interest in Alex Taub's presentation, but the message it delivered did not seem to satisfy the slogan-hungry audience, despite the fact that the substance of his paper is both significant and hard to refute. Elsie Pitcairn then introduced Daisy Johnson, loud applause droning out her announced affiliation.

Daisy Johnson is a well-known campaigner. She has appeared in the media on numerous occasions over the last decade, usually speaking on race relations and equality issues, more recently on the rights of the Windrush generation and more recently still on Black Lives Matter. She was an organiser of the demonstration in Tower Hamlets in 2020 after the death of George Floyd, a demonstration which provoked a counterdemonstration by white supremacist groups. The occasion passed without incident, but remnants of both groups were still in the Commercial Road area on the night of the demonstration. There was a disturbance and riot police were in attendance. Eighteen arrests were made. The incident was not reported on national media. (Updated July 2020)

Daisy Johnson is now sixty-seven. She is ostensibly retired from political life, having been a long-standing councillor and having served one term as a London Assembly Member. She has spent the last five years promoting EAR, East London Against Racism which, ostensibly, is a membership organization based in Tower Hamlets, but has declared members from throughout the country. Daisy Johnson undoubtedly is sincere about her beliefs and is committed to the stated aims of the group. She does, however, use the organisation's structures and profile to pursue her own political ends, the media invitations in particular allowing her to keep her public profile active. Colleagues may wish to open the personal file on Ms Johnson, where numerous links with both commercial and non-governmental organisations are listed. Her affiliations and interests are extensive. Again, cross-linking information, if you have any, would be welcome.

DJ (She began by raising her arms to acknowledge the rapturous applause and then to quell it. Her voice is stentorian, her presence vast and her charisma almost tangible. She speaks with a heavy, perhaps partially manufactured Jamaican patois accent.) Good evening everybody and thanks to you all for turning out tonight. We are here to address a single issue, the Uking Palace development, and I will say much about it. But I also want to widen the debate, especially in the light of what Dr. Taub has just said about this accommodation. Far from being mere student residence, the project is actually aimed at

recruiting medium-term elite residents into our city. Extending Dr. Taub's argument, we imagine that, in four- or five-year's time, when all the Uking Palace units are occupied by leaseholders, the company Uking will buy more of the old industrial area and build more elite blocks. Surely that is the scenario we face! What would be the logic in not doing so if their business model on the first phase had already proved successful?

DJ (Waiting for the audience murmuring to subside) But this leads me to ask why it is that there is permission to build these blocks aimed at elite Chinese students when there is no construction of affordable housing for those of us who already live here? (Loud applause.) There are thousands of people in this area of London living in poor quality, old, damp or even rat-infested housing. They need help. They need affordable, good quality housing, possibly of the kind that councils used to build. Nowadays, even a Victorian terrace around here costs over half a million. How many families can get near the mortgage needed to buy that? (Shouts of nobody, not us, etc.)

DJ And, as always, ethnic minorities are at the bottom of the pile, economically and socially. They can't afford elite flats, even if they are Chinese! Allowing projects like Uking Palace to go ahead will change the nature of this community. Eventually it will make affordable housing harder to build, harder to obtain and, if the project expands, prices in the area will put all but the worst, lowest standard accommodation out of the reach of the poor.

Daisy Johnson spoke for a further twenty minutes and covered more on housing, aspects of racism, the rights of Windrush survivors and finished with an all-out attack on the government, claiming that the planning acceptance had been effectively purchased by donations to the party's national funds. She did not name individuals but did refer the audience to the newspaper and television coverage of the issue.

Daisy Johnson is potentially a powerful and influential voice within the Off Uking Palace campaign. She is respected and has a record of tactical success in pursuing issues that interest her. We will have to employ defensive tactics of our own to question her eligibility to comment on this development.

Now it has come to light from information I have supplied to my manager that Daisy Johnson, when she was a member of the London Assembly, endorsed a proposal that actually came from within Hackney Metro University to expand its offer in certain areas of its curriculum in order to attract more students from overseas, specifically wealthy Chinese students. At the time, Daisy Johnson declared her overall support for the plan, based on an assumption that funding for universities like Hackney Metro would come under pressure as a result of the austerity policies being followed at the time. I have secured a copy of the original document and have forwarded it to Wendy Davis for use in an article she is preparing for The News.

Elsie Pitcairn closed the meeting by announcing another public meeting in a month's

time and the possibility of a demonstration at the proposed site the following weekend. The meeting ended without further chanting at half past nine.

A blueprint for the future? Or a one-off special case?

Uking Terbuka Signs Agreement with Xiamen Region

Straits Journal, Singapore, 9 August 2014, authored by our business correspondent

We are used to Chinese companies investing throughout the region. It may be overstatement, but one would be excused if one concluded that there was not a single large urban development, infrastructure project, energy generation or distribution initiative or new natural resource exploitation project that did not involve Chinese interest. Direct investment, partnerships with local companies or government agencies, or participation in conglomerates to share risk, all these arrangements and more are increasingly employed by Chinese players keen on extending their interests beyond their own borders. It has become a commonplace these days to say that those once nationally focused mainland interests are now eyeing multinational status.

But what about the opposite direction? How often do we hear about South-East Asian companies entering broad, strategic partnerships with mainland partners in the People’s Republic? Uking Terbuka, the Indonesian finance and property conglomerate, yesterday broke this mould of expectation by signing a memorandum of understanding with numerous bodies in Xiamen, including state-run organisations and private companies. Though no specific project is

mentioned in the agreement, a company spokesman declared after the signing that several new initiatives, based on the provisions of the agreement, would be announced in the coming weeks.

In an interview with the Straits Journal, Sarnu Joyo, an Executive Director of Uking Terbuka outlined company thinking. “We have all assumed in recent years that the Chinese economy would grow both internally and externally in the future, but with the primary focus increasingly moving to projects outside of China’s borders. The internal market in China now forms the third largest single market in the world, after the European Union and the United States. Increasingly, however, we have also assumed that mainland Chinese interests would automatically seek to operate multi-nationally, given that their spectacular growth of recent years might be hard to sustain from local market involvement only. That is only to be expected. What we have only rarely considered is the possibility of corporations from outside China participating in that giant market as equal partners. Uking Terbuka, from today, is challenging those assumptions by signing our agreement with multiple partner agencies in Xiamen.”

Straits Journal asked what kind of projects were envisaged. Sarnu Joyo refused to offer specific details, saying that since the understanding had only just been signed, it would be inappropriate at this stage to announce anything other than general areas of mutual interest. “We envisage high-end residential

developments," he said, "and some significant retail parks in prestigious, high-profile locations." He continued by stating that infrastructure projects would only come later, if at all. "That sector requires us to cooperate more deeply with the state, so that might be more difficult to manage in the short term, given that we remain primarily an Indonesian company," he explained. "We are signing one agreement with mainland state agencies," he clarified, "not becoming one. If, in the future, as a result of cooperation that is initially purely commercial, we manage to forge a strong relationship based on shared interests, then we may discuss broadening our agreements to include different areas."

In what sounded like a fascinating, even ground-breaking initiative, Sarnu Joyo went on to describe a possible avenue of cooperation around education. "Uking Terbuka has long wanted to establish interests in European property, particularly in London. We are currently negotiating a partnership with a London university to construct rather specialized accommodation for foreign students, who always have significant difficulty in finding accommodation of the right standard in a competitive and expensive environment like the British capital. What we are planning is accommodation for students that could be flexible enough so that later it might also provide longer term accommodation for those students who wanted to stay on, perhaps to develop longer term professional commitments to the United Kingdom.

“We believe that this arrangement may prove to be a model for future development. We envision students initially renting accommodation on short-term contracts, but contracts that, from the start, have built-in the opportunity for extension into longer-term leasehold, long enough to sustain permanent or semi-permanent residence after graduation. We even anticipate that some residents might even want nine hundred and ninety-nine year leases, which would then allow their properties to be bought and sold on the open market. Uking Terbuka, of course, would retain ownership of the site, the buildings and the land, but effectively such units could then potentially transfer into the general property market, thus adding to the locally available housing stock.

“There are several parties in Xiamen province who are interested in accessing such a scheme. It would be a double win for our company, in that we could become established in UK real estate and at the same time facilitate educational opportunities for elite families.”

The possibility was raised that this cooperation might achieve something more political rather than purely commercial on behalf of the owners of Uking. The corporation still retains a high degree of influence from its founding family, who saw their company begin to grow exponentially from the seventies, though the bulk of its expansion has happened over the last two decades. The Sarnu family at the time of the company’s foundation were still identified with the ethnic Chinese community and thus, at that

time in Indonesia, only loosely and perhaps resentfully linked to national interests. Indeed, there was a period when political leaders in Indonesia dismissed them as a set of ‘chindos’, a term that no member of the Indonesian government would be likely to use nowadays. Since then, of course, the family has adopted Indonesian nationality and its members have become Muslims. “I think that aspect of our initiative, even that aspect of our family’s past, is of interest only in the minds of certain Singaporean journalists,” Sarnu Joyo pointed out, dismissively. “In the Indonesia of today, the Sarnu family, along with its majority holding in Uking Terbuka, is not seen as anything apart from the mainstream of Indonesian society, business and commerce. We are completely integrated these days.”

As a result of separate investigations, however, the Straits Journal has learned that the project in the United Kingdom could not be pursued by a Chinese corporation independently, given that there exists specific political lobbying against Chinese corporate involvement in the UK’s higher education sector, though not, of course, opposition to fee-paying Chinese students enrolling on UK university courses. If such campaigning were to present a block to future initiatives, then this Uking initiative is crucial in realizing broader aims, both on behalf of the company and on behalf of Chinese interests that are essentially and eventually state interests.

Uking Terbuka promised more details would emerge of future cooperation between itself and

Xiamen private and state bodies in the coming months. But, on the evidence of the joint press release from the company and its Chinese regional government partners, we are perhaps witnessing the dawn of a new era and new style of economic cooperation between two of our region’s giants

Discussion paper on recent finds in the Mabala Cave complex, Sawu Island, Indonesia - Was Flores Man a regional inhabitant, or is it time to name Sawu man as a separate species? - Professor Edward Pitcairn PhD, Hackney Metro University and Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta

(Draft - Further detail and references to follow)

Abstract

Archaeological excavations have been taking place in the vicinity of Mabala Cave on Sawu for over two decades. Stone tools have been located and catalogued. In recent years, there have emerged more extensive remains of humanoid habitation and bone fragments have been identified. These fragments have recently been prepared for analysis; an unusually lengthy restoration time being required because of the extremely fragile nature of the finds. This paper describes the characteristics of the bone fragments and compares them to remains found on Flores. It also examines evidence of cultural links via lithic analysis of stone tools across the two islands. It concludes that there exists a strong possibility that the Sawu finds represent either a close relative of Flores Man on Sawu in prehistoric times or may suggest that the two locations were inhabited by the same species of hominid. Further questions arise if this proves to be the case.

Background

Archaeological work on Sawu Island began in the nineties, before the detailed findings from

Flores were published. By 2010, the work had located several sites of interest in or near to the Mabala complex. Because the area was becoming more popular as a tourist destination, work progressed slowly because permission to conduct research at the site was slow to arrive and then the dig was restricted to just a few months during the wet season to coincide with low tourist footfall.

Geographically, Sawu also presents the researcher with some unique challenges. Drier than most other parts of Indonesia, it does have the advantage of a significant and dependable dry season, which might suggest that prehistoric material might be better preserved there than on Flores, which is wetter for longer.

In fact, the distinct separation of wet and dry on Sawu achieves the opposite effect, since the wet season regularly washes away dried-out soil layers, with obviously the most recent layers being destroyed first. Newly exposed layers tend to be volcanic, suggesting that this washing away of new deposits has been happening for some time, since the normal processes of sedimentation do not seem to have happened across large areas of the island. The obvious consequence is that new material laid down has always had a significant chance of being washed away from the site before it has had time to embed in sediment, let alone fossilize.

Secondly, Sawu is sufficiently wet and tropical to render samples which do remain both fragile and decomposed. As on Flores, samples of organic material have generally been rendered

into a substance that resembles wet cardboard. Once unearthed, they dry quickly and disintegrate, falling within days to dust, meaning that such finds need to be handled both quickly and with extreme care. As soon as they are transportable, they have to be taken immediately to a laboratory where they can be dried slowly in a humidity-controlled environment before being treated with plasticising stabilizers. Because of these constraints, none of the organic material has yet been examined for DNA analysis. It is also highly unlikely that a suitable sample for such analysis will be obtained in the near future. The essential method of handling the samples has unfortunately been a constant hindrance to the process of radio-carbon dating.

To date, work has been conducted for approximately four months each year, with analysis and measurement data being collected for some six months each year. In addition, the facilities used by the project in Yogyakarta are effectively closed for the two remaining months because of national and religious holidays. Much of the team’s time and effort has of necessity been devoted to the preservation process mentioned above, a process which has proved to be extremely time consuming. Lithic analysis of stone tools is, by its nature, also slow, but the techniques used for such specimens are the standard ones and there now exists a significant and now sufficiently extensive database of documented finds to allow statistically valid interrogation. Some preliminary results of the process will follow.

Thus far, the material published by the Sawu researchers has concentrated on the methodology and process involved in the excavation. This is entirely to be expected because of the paucity of material catalogued to date. But now there is sufficient data to allow analysis, more detailed discussion papers will surely emerge with this introductory paper being the first attempt.

Lithic analysis

It is not the purpose of this paper to present a detailed and technical analysis of the stone tool characteristics discovered in the Sawu excavations. This will be addressed in subsequent papers. What will be offered here, however, is an overview which will offer a context within which more detailed discussion can take place.

To date, we have catalogued 157 artifacts, mostly small (less than 25 millimetres in length) and mostly made from the volcanic material that forms the harder and less easily washed off layers of the island's geology. Some of the items, just ten, are larger, and range from hand hammers to fragments of what appear to be harpoons or spears. No complete examples of larger items have been found, only fragments that do suggest they were originally part of more substantial objects.

Artefacts display more than one modal style, indicating that they may have originated from different periods or that different production systems were being used at the same time. Stone tools such as knives, blades or scrapers are often

finely shaped, indicating that several knaps at the core material have been employed. There is also evidence that sharp edges were honed to improve their quality, which itself indicates a level of sophistication and skill that belies the classification of these cultures as merely hominid.

Rough dating of these finds is all that has been possible, but it is likely that none of the tools in the database is newer than 40,000 years old. This data cannot be described as reliable, since it has been achieved via evidence gleaned from miniscule deposits of organic material in the vicinity of the find and occupying the same strata level. Given the tendency of the island's climate to wash away newly deposited material each year, however, the association between the object and its strata may be no more than circumstantial.

What seems to be clear, however, is that the material discovered thus far in the Sawu excavations is in both character and construction similar to that found on Flores, material that has been associated with Flores man. The concept of similarity applied here, of course, is that there exists nothing from Sawu that differs significantly from the Flores artefacts. There is currently insufficient evidence to claim actual concordance.

Organic remains

As mentioned earlier, the recovery and preservation of human material from the Sawu site has posed many technical problems, which have only been acceptably solved in recent years. The dig has catalogued twenty finds, of which the

first ten were lost to degradation and disintegration. Everything, of course, was photographed and documented, so even the lost specimens can be analysed in terms of anatomical characteristics.

The specimens comprise arm or wrist bone fragments (six), leg or foot bone fragments (five), vertebrae fragments (eight) and a single pelvic fragment. No specimen relating to the head has yet emerged. These specimens, however, are consistent with the 'hobbit' stature of Flores man, a hominid of about one metre in height. Compelling here is the fact that no larger bone specimens have been unearthed, so these are probably remains of individuals of the Flores man type, rather than juveniles of Homo habilis or Homo sapiens. The arm and wrist material in particular indicated the concordance with the Flores type. This seems to add further weight to the assertion above that there is nothing here to suggest that Sawu specimens originate from a separate species.

Associated with the human bone specimens were some remnants of animal origin, notably identifiable remains of the stegadon, or prehistoric elephant, and the Comodo dragon. Both species seemed to have formed part of the prehistoric hominid's diet, an observation that adds further weight to the concordance with Flores.

Concluding remarks

This preliminary paper is designed to set the parameters for the more detailed reporting that

will follow. Thus far, analysis suggests that the hominid population of Sawu was at least related to that of Flores. It is likely that they were long-limbed, small-brained hominids about one metre tall. The development of their culture, as evidenced by their stone tool manufacture, was highly sophisticated, however, and like Flores man it shared features that were prevalent at the time in contemporary Homo sapiens. There is no evidence thus far that points to Sawu residents being a wholly different species. Indeed, given the existence of remains of a similar type in the Philippines, it is possible that this dwarf hominid was in fact widespread in the region, thus calling into question the need for a separate descriptor even for Flores.

Far from being a disappointment for the researcher, this finding is in fact quite radical and remarkable. Though Sawu is on the same side of the Wallace Line as Flores, there is a significant amount of ocean between them. Indeed, there is a substantial amount of ocean between Sawu and anywhere! If, as this preparatory paper suggests, the hominids of Sawu and Flores were of the same species, then there exist three possible explanations. One: the early hominid population occupied a single land mass that subsequently split apart or suffered inundation by rising sea levels. This process, however, would have taken place in geological time, and would probably have resulted in subsequent evolutionary changes in the separated populations, causing them to diverge more significantly than the archaeological

evidence suggests. Two: the possibility remains that what we are finding are deformed or malformed Homo habilis individuals. The fact that the two island communities seem to have shared the same diet and lifestyle may have resulted in the same developmental problems. The lack, however, of a greater number of contemporary and indigent Homo habilis specimens interspersed with those of the ‘hobbit’ man would suggest that the latter’s small stature was a population trait and not a relative rarity within a larger and physically different population. Three: (and this is the really interesting proposition) the Sawu and Flores remains are of a single species and that separation by sea occurred in non-geological time, thus not allowing enough time for there to have been divergence by evolutionary mechanisms. Equally, and more probably, given that evidence from Flores points to the possibility that these hominids lived there within the last thirty thousand years, the possibility emerges that these pygmy ‘hobbits’ were in fact capable of ocean-going navigation and that their spread throughout the region was as a result of migration, rather than separate local evolution.

Readers of this preparatory paper will now understand why this theory needed to be aired and discussed so that subsequent publications can consider this as yet wholly theoretical, but revolutionary idea. Prehistoric hominids may have migrated.

Inspection of archaeological site at Mabala, Sawu by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports

Sujatmiko Kurniawan Hum, Administrative Officer, University Standards Committee, Yogyakarta University

The archaeological site at Mabala Cave on Sawu is a project managed by the University of Yogyakarta. Its legal status is the same as that of any other university activity, though of course it is a field activity, off campus. However, since it remains a university and therefore a public project, all the regulations on dress and behaviour that would apply to any other activity on a government site - whether on campus or off campus - apply to the whole excavation and its participants. It remains the responsibility of the onsite managers to see that the rules and regulations are followed. In relation to this issue, I have several observations and recommendations, which will follow in the conclusion to the report.

I visited the Mabala Cave site on Rabi' II 18, 1441 AH (15 December 2019), arriving by car from the town centre at 8am. I spent that whole day observing practices, interviewing project managers and leaders, talking to staff and reviewing the project's achievements. I must begin by thanking all of the staff concerned for their continued hard work and dedication and, with one notable exception, for their cooperation with and facilitation of my inspection.

The inspection process and observations

Upon arrival, I was greeted by Professor Sarnu Onggo, who received me in his field office for the briefing. His office is housed in a temporary cabin, but with water and electricity installed. He explained the reasoning for keeping the facility temporary. It is to allow the structure to be moved off site to the car park for storage during the height of the tourist season. There are three such portable cabins in use, Dr. Sarnu's office, a space for cataloguing, photographing and packaging finds, ready for their twice-weekly dispatch to the university for further analysis, and a third building which is used as the site kitchen.

Social areas for staff, dining areas and much of the sleeping is under a large awning stretched across a clearing, with the surrounding trees being used to secure the covering. These practices ensure that as little of the dig as possible remains visible when tourists visit the site during the dry season. The tactic of restricting most of the research work to the wet season was questioned by several staff members at the site, but there is no alternative if the all-important tourist visitors are to be given the priority that is necessary.

Dr. Sarnu's overview of the project was clear and comprehensive. He explained that the project's management in terms of its logistical organization was in the hands of himself and his assistant administrator, while the direction of the practical archaeology, the handling of finds and

the deployment of staff on the dig was the joint responsibility of himself and his colleague, Professor Edward Pitcairn, Emeritus Professor of Archaeology, Hackney Metro University, London, England. While I found the administration, accounting and record keeping at the site to be exemplary, I will have several comments to make about the practical work, especially its organisation. I am not qualified to comment on the academic validity or worth of the work being carried out, but I am assured by Professor Hidayat from Djakarta, who conducted a recent audit of its progress, that it has been and remains of the very highest international standard.

The inspection

I was shown the excavation site in detail. This was surprisingly close to the cave entrance, and not, as I had expected, deep within its depths. I was prompted to ask whether this meant that the site was regularly flooded in the wet season, but I was assured that an adequate supply of tarpaulin sheets was on hand to hang over exposed areas if and when required.

The main site consisted of four deep pits, three of them about four meters long and two meters wide, but over two meters deep. The fourth was the same depth but twice as long as the other three, cutting across their ends at right angles. They were all equipped with ladders for staff access. The fifth and last pit I saw was a new area of interest, slightly apart from the others. Professor Sarnu told me that this was an area he had expressly asked to be opened just six months

before. He explained that it had been his idea to widen the study rather than concentrate it in the hope that new evidence would come to light to support his theory that the other finds from the site formed evidence of a completely new species of human. This fifth pit was shallower than the others.

Some of the staff were at work when I inspected. The four deep pits each had two excavators, while the newer fifth had four. The staff are international in nature. Of the twelve people on the site, apart from those already listed, four are Western women, two Australians and two Americans. Of the eight male staff, six are nationals, while one is from Malaysia and the last is from the Universiti Brunei Darussalam.

Unfortunately, I have to report that dress codes were not being observed correctly. All government sponsored places of work must follow the prescribed dress codes as described in Ministry Decree 2009/81. Those rules stipulate that all staff should wear head covering, which is mandatory for women and advised for men. It says also that shoulders and arms should always be covered at all times, as should the legs. Exceptions are made for the legs of those involved with sporting activity, where the regulation is that the covering should extend at least as far as the knee. Practical archaeological digs, I am advised, fall into the ambit of sporting activity for the purposes of applying the dress codes. At Mabala Cave, however, I observed all four of the Western women wearing t-shirts cut away at the top of the arm and shorts that did not

even extend down the thigh. While it has never been the purpose of these rules to discriminate, it has also to be recorded that all four of these women were working alongside Muslim men, who were thus being unnecessarily exposed to temptation.

It must also be recorded that the Malaysian at the site, also a Muslim, was not wearing a head covering when I inspected. I was told that this was because at that time he was involved with an activity that required him to lie on his side at the bottom of the pit while he removed dirt with a brush from around an object of interest. I was not wholly convinced by this argument, since if it were true, then this work could easily have been postponed until the day after the inspection.

Also, at eating times, I observed that the male and female staff were eating together, a practice we strongly discourage, though it is not proscribed.

Even more worryingly, I managed to observe one of the Western women consuming food that she had brought onto the site and had cooked herself. I suspected at the time that some of this food was haram, and yet she was eating her meal in the vicinity of two of the male staff, so they may have been forced to inhale some of the odours. I found this deeply disturbing.

Professor Sarnu, his administrator, Widono, and four of the national male staff leave the site at dusk to spend the night in a dormitory at the local school, where private rooms have been created for them. The drive to that location from the dig takes about fifteen minutes and so I was

further informed by Professor Sarnu that none of them ever returns to the site for any reason until the next workday morning.

Given this scenario, I have reason to believe that the Westerners, probably, are consuming alcohol at the site in the evenings. I took the trouble to inspect the waste bins at the site and recovered specific confirmatory evidence of this (dated photographs with GPS location are included).

While the consumption of alcohol in our country is not illegal, it may not be consumed in the workplace if that workplace is a government-sponsored site. I thus consider my observations at the Mabala Cave to be in contravention of these rules.

And, if all the above were not enough, I must also report that the sleeping arrangements for the excavating staff are simply inadequate. That there is insufficient segregation of the sexes is obvious. There is a single wide canopy under which most of the employees sleep in sleeping bags and small permanently erected tents, but there are no designated male and female areas, and I saw no evidence of signs to indicate that any separation of the sexes had ever taken place.

After a total of three hours observation, at approximately 3pm, I asked Professor Sarnu to convene a management meeting so I could communicate my concerns. This meeting began at 4pm. Present at the meeting were Professors Sarnu and Pitcairn, and the site administrator, Widono. I began by congratulating all present and the project in general for the quality of its

archaeological work. I went on to describe the practical considerations I have listed above and offered some recommendations to remedy the situation, as detailed below.

Dress code - to be followed at all times when staff are on site; women not to wear cut-away t-shirts and shorts, but to wear long sleeved shirts, buttoned at the wrist with at least leggings that cover the entire leg, with the shirts long enough to cover the shape of the body; Muslim men to wear head coverings and at least knee-length shorts.

Dining - separate areas for halal and non-halal dining, preferably with the sexes separated; no food purchased off site to be brought within the project's boundaries.

Alcohol - should not under any circumstances be present on the site; consumption of alcohol on government premises is a serious breach of regulations and would normally warrant dismissal from government service.

Concluding remarks

Overall, these recommendations were politely and humbly received. The exception was Professor Pitcairn who, frankly, was abusive to me. He dismissed my observations and thus flouted my authority. I consider this to be a serious breach of his terms of service and I communicated this to the project's head, Professor Sarnu. I made it clear that I was not happy with Professor Pitcairn's attitude, neither was I convinced of his suitability for future membership of the team. I expected him,

Professor Sarnu, to initiate the collection of evidence that would illustrate whether his colleague was or was not following the guidelines I had identified. I also made it clear to Professor Sarnu that his own, and indeed his family's longer-term interests might be affected if he failed to comply with my wishes.

I submit this as a fair and true record of the official inspection of government site, Mabala Cave archaeological site, operated under the auspices of the University of Yogyakarta.

Signed: Sujatmiko Kurniawan Hum, Administrative Officer, University Standards Committee, Yogyakarta University

Sometimes, the scene can be important, can impose its character and style on proceedings. Designers thus often determine the message, if not its content, then at least its perceived character. This is how the medium can become the message, so what is communicated becomes its presentation. We have many stock phrases to describe such impressions, slick, informal, strait-laced, matter of fact, conventional, the list is not trying to be exhaustive. Decor, colour, the use of motif, verbiage, furniture, they can add that extra quality that then both accentuates meaning and communicates in its own right.

For what the participants called their regular meeting, annual at most, perhaps conducted a dozen times in total, the setting said it all. Hackney Metro University would probably win no architectural awards. Let’s rephrase that. Hackney Metro University would probably not make the entry for architectural awards.

Built largely in the era of brutal functionalism, its concrete almost surrounds. It seems ubiquitous, is visible everywhere, its grey almost tricking the eye to ignore the blackness of the glass that bands across its structures, apparently suggesting a similar vacant darkness within. There is one earlier building at its heart, a brick-built three-storey London school board relic, green domed at either end, still proudly showing off its original white painted, giant wooden sash windows, now peeling both paint and putty on the upper stories and, no doubt, unopened in 30

years. Its sash cords are probably rotted, the hanging counterweights long since not hanging and its movable sections having been screwed through to static in the seventies. And the newer sections of Hackney Metro? They are from the era of austerity, constructed in the second half of the last century, it has to be said, but having the air of a badly jig-sawed puzzle whose concept fit together, but whose reality left draughty gaps. It was in one such building, in a room whose decor boasted grey plastic tiles, grey painted walls and mottled false ceiling tiles which appeared to have been recently sprayed with chewed liquorice, where Edward Pitcairn met his minders.

Add a table, chipboard topped, metal framed, whose iron-on plastic wood-effect finish was already migrating from the edges to reveal fibres that had repeatedly been poked by bored, seminar suffering fingernails, and sit the assembled on plastic bucket seats mounted on tubular frames that had for many years shown evidence of creeping metal fatigue. There four people, three men, all middle-aged to elderly, all white, all suited and tied, all quietly formal in their informal way, and one woman, much younger, brightly made up with redder than red lipstick, mirror surfaced patent shoes, no leg covering emerging from an extremely short skirt that had a zip all the way up the front and a top that was, well, a top, though what it was on top off was largely visible. The six male eyes around that junk-heap table regularly followed the undulations of what was not covered as her recording hand took notes of what was said. Her

name was Debbie, and she was the proud owner of a short-term renewable contract as an administrative assistant in the vice-chancellor's office, a post whose daily tasks enervated, but whose proximity to albeit local power rendered forever interesting.

Debbie had already placed on record with the union representative, unfortunately for Debbie representing a union of which she was not a member, that Professor John Mitchell, 58, now high flying, business and management type, had a habit of standing too close when delivering her daily work schedule, her seated at her desk, he towering above her swivel chair from his six foot three. Debbie was quietly resentful, but largely tolerant. Had she held the post for longer than a year, she might have been tempted to use the term 'long suffering', and she did need the income to pay her rent. She was still struggling to find stability in life some four years and three boyfriends after graduating from what she at eighteen and in her first year had thought was a prestigious university with a degree in history.

John Mitchell's rise to the top has not been meteoric. He was neither incisive nor inspired, neither dynamic nor dominant, but he was efficient, bureaucratic and careful. If his degree had been taken in the age-old subject of 'covering ones back', he would surely have taken a doublefirst. He generally admitted responsibility for nothing, ascribed all decisions to an ever unidentifiable, unlocatable commonality of feeling, and ruled by a claimed consensus that he personally not only perceived but also usually

defined. A tall man, rakishly thin and usually stooped, he displayed a tendency to straighten his back when questioned so he could deliver his defence from above. He had, however, proved an effective self-promoter, despite his apparently apologetic manner. He had taken a first degree from Leicester, worked in banking for several years and then taken a lectureship in business and management at Hackney Metro in his early thirties, largely out of a desire to distance himself from the highly competitive workplaces of the private sector, only soon to discover that the utilitarian corridors of academic life were, in fact, at least as competitive as the multinational he had left. He was a head of department inside five years, head of faculty in ten and then had become vice-chancellor of the university some ten years ago at an interview where the panel judged him the safest, though perhaps the most boring pair of hands on offer.

Professor Larry Wiseman, a mercurial, small individual from new England with a voice like an automatic weapon is head of the Humanities Faculty, a term that took him years to accommodate, since for an American it meant the teachers, themselves. Openly and almost aggressively gay, he supported a pair of trainers at the base of his business suit, whose jacket advertised a veritable billboard of pins and badges, all expressing some degree of support for a cause, a campaign, an issue, or, in one case, a people. He had spoken to the vice-chancellor just half an hour before this meeting convened at eleven to restate his disquiet about archaeology’s

continued inclusion in the Humanities Faculty, given that in most institutions nowadays it is described as a science. Mitchell had correctly concluded that Wiseman was merely expressing his reluctance to associate himself with the delivery of unpopular bad news and had privately concluded that if he was going to have to shovel shit, then the appropriate head of faculty was damned well going to help.

The fourth person at the table, of course, was Professor Edward Pitcairn, whom we know already. All four wore facemasks, in three cases the simple light and dark blue with white elastic behind the ears. The other mask type in evidence adorned Professor Wiseman's face. It was white, secured by tapes that not only passed around the ears, but also tied high up on the crown of the head. It protruded a good three inches beyond his mouth and had not one but two latticed vents, one to the left of the nose, one below lip level, that seemed to hide valves that clicked a little when its wearer spoke, thus accentuating the usual staccato of his delivery with audible attack grace notes. The tightly tied tapes caused his hair to ruffle, causing Professor Wiseman rather resembled a bleached Darth Vader, his badged jacket mimicking decorated military uniform.

The tone, throughout, was one of managed informality, the general chitchat of greeting having subsided as each attendee sought to assemble papers on the desktop before them. "OK, Edward, everyone, shall we start?" It was Mitchell who began proceedings, rightfully claiming the chair. Debbie took notes, but she

had also turned on the record function on her phone.

“Well, first we must formally welcome you back, Edward. It’s been another year and we are eager to hear your updates on progress. Indeed, it’s been two years since we met in the flesh. I believe last year was Zoomed.” Mitchell cast a glance at Pitcairn who nodded, silently. “So, Edward…”

“Certainly. My pleasure.” Pitcairn cleared his throat, took up a single sheet from the folder before him and read.

“Edward Pitcairn, Emeritus Professor of Archaeology, Hackney Metro University. Progress update on Sawu excavation, 2020 to 2021. Dated fourth of May 2021

“We have witnessed another exciting year at the dig. Further to finds announced in the previous two annual reports, we have uncovered another twenty-five significant objects, mostly stone tools but also some human bone fragments. All of these finds have been catalogued by the department in Yogyakarta and a detailed description alongside a photograph of each item is supplied in the annexe to this summary.”

Pitcairn paused momentarily to pat the cover of his folder with the palm of his hand. Debbie interjected with, “You have a copy for me?” She was leaning to the side slightly towards Pitcairn. Mitchell and Wiseman’s eyes focused on the widening gap between her loose top and armpit as Pitcairn confirmed, “This is in fact for you. I will give it to you at the end.” Debbie smiled and made a note.

Pitcairn continued. “The year has not produced any wholly new avenues of enquiry. It has been very much a year of consolidation and evidence building, with a focus on analysis rather than increased excavation. Professor Sanu has opened a new site, still inside the Mabala complex, close to the other trenches, but not contiguous. As yet, results from there are still inconclusive. In my opinion this change of focus for the dig will not uncover any new or changed evidence, and that it will merely add weight to what we already know.

“This year’s focus on analysis has allowed me to formulate a position, however, and I intend to publish this as an hypothesis…”

“Hypothesis?” Wiseman’s brisk interruption sought clarification, clearly judging that after nearly a decade and a half of work, the project might have already progressed beyond the hypothesis stage.

Pitcairn diverged from his notes momentarily. “It has to be offered with that status. I cannot yet claim that our evidence is extensive enough or clear enough to make any definitive claim. I choose the term hypothesis, also, as a way of challenging alternative positions that I anticipate may appear in the near future.”

“From Professor Sarnu…,” said Mitchell. Pitcairn nodded. Mitchell’s waved open hand gestured that Pitcairn should continue.

“My proposed paper will postulate…”

“Speculate or suggest. It’s only an hypothesis,” Wiseman suggested. Mitchell’s sidelong glance towards his colleague asked for no further interruption and at the same time expressed

surprise that one so reluctant to attend these proceedings seemed so keen to exert his presence.

"On the contrary," said Pitcairn. "Postulate," he repeated assertively, "My proposed paper will postulate that evidence of early hominid presence on Sawu is entirely consistent with similar finds in Indonesia, notably on Flores and also further afield, particularly on Sulawesi and in the Philippines. I will suggest that the finds on Sawu have been instrumental in encouraging a reassessment of previous work and a re-evaluation of the significance of already documented finds. That reassessment will conclude, in my judgment, that there existed a single species of early human who lived throughout the region, continuing into the era beyond the existence of a land bridge to facilitate migration on foot."

"I am no archaeologist…"

"Indeed." Pitcairn's interrupted confirmation of Wiseman status was gently sharp.

"…but it seems to me that if a land bridge existed, the migration could have been completed before it disappeared."

"If you would allow me to continue…" Pitcairn started to read again. "Finds throughout the region have been dated according to various schema. Our work on Sawu, however, has uncovered no object that definitely predates the era of the land bridge. Equally, we have material that definitely is more recent than the era of the bridge. This recent material, in my opinion, does not exhibit any evolutionary divergence from the

earlier material. Now dating of the Sawu material has proved problematic because the island's climate has for thousands of years interfered with the process of sedimentation. Also, the relative paucity of finds on Sawu means that our evidence cannot be described in anyway as conclusive. But the fact remains that we now have sufficient evidence to postulate that early, dwarf hominids…" Wiseman winced at the word dwarf." "…were present on Sawu only after the land bridge disappeared."

"So how did they migrate?" It was Mitchell who interjected prematurely as it happens.

Pitcairn grunted and continued reading. "This leads me to a rather revolutionary…"

"Rather revolutionary…," repeated Wiseman, with a hint of a giggle and a glance, in turn, at each of the others, as if he might be seeking a reaction from his audience. "Wonderful British understatement."

Pitcairn grunted again and repeated. "This leads me to a rather revolutionary conclusion that these early hominids migrated by sea."

"Even from Sulawesi and the Philippines?" Mitchells' interjection was informed. Pitcairn nodded.

"Across the Wallace line?" Mitchell again was specific. Pitcairn cast a sidelong glance towards the vice-chancellor. The pause he inserted suggested he believed that the insight in Mitchell's comments proved he had been briefed.

Pitcairn continued. "Indeed. This would necessarily redefine our understanding of the intellectual capabilities of early hominids, in that

it would place the development of navigation capability several millennia earlier than previously thought."

Edward Pitcairn paused here. His intention was to let this ground-breaking idea register with his colleagues. Mitchell was speechless, fully appreciating the idea. Wiseman looked confused. Debbie spoke, "So they sailed…"

"Yes. That is the point."

"Across the Wallace line?" asked Mitchell again.

Pitcairn nodded.

There was a silence for a moment, during which Debbie rearranged her papers and dug out a new pen from her zipped bag to replace the one that had just run out. The eyes of all three men traced her movements. It was Mitchell who spoke.

"But there is another idea, isn't there?"

"Indeed, there is," said Pitcairn, placing his single typed sheet back in his folder.

"…that the Sawu hominids are a separate species…"

"Homo sarnuensis, indeed," said Pitcairn in a voice that communicated that he had heard it all before. "No evidence at all…"

But I understand that Professor Sarnu will publish this in the near future..." Mitchell had clearly sniffed the perfume of difference, or perhaps the stink of dispute. His change of tack revealed his primary concern of maintaining institutional and indeed international peace. "This would not look good. … And Sarnu, after all, is one of our own, as well."

Pitcairn said nothing for a while. Then he patted the cover of his folder again, saying, “It’s all in here. The documentation is detailed. But as I have indicated, the paucity of material from the site does not allow anyone, and I stress anyone to make definitive claims of any sort.”

Again, there was a silence. The normally verbose Wiseman, realising he was out of his technical depth, was now clearly consciously deferring to authority. “And when are the conflicting papers to be published? Have you written yours yet?”

Pitcairn smiled a little at Mitchell. “As far as Sarnu is concerned, I don’t know. The last thing he said to me was that he intended to work on it during the dig’s off-season.”

“Meaning now.”

“Yes. As to my own…” Pitcairn again paused.

“There is a problem, isn’t there?” Mitchell was clearly well informed. Pitcairn nodded. “Edward… It seems so… How can I put this…? I’m so sorry…”

Pitcairn did shed a tear or two behind his stoical expression. “You got the report from Khan, no doubt.” His voice quivered.

Mitchell nodded. “Edward… I am so sorry… What can one say?”

“Very little, actually,” said Pitcairn, almost completing Mitchell’s phrase. “The results are clear. The prognosis is beyond reasonable doubt.” There followed a prolonged silence. Pitcairn cast a glance toward Wiseman, who clearly had been briefed, as, also clearly, had Debbie. They both maintained a calculated and advised silence.

“How long…”

“A week… Two… Three… A month… Two… Three… A year…”

The shrug was one of powerlessness, not ignorance. He turned immediately towards Wiseman, who was looking uncharacteristically confused, so much so that Pitcairn clearly believed it to be a calculated front. But it was Mitchell who spoke.

“Larry has been briefed,” he said, as Wiseman nodded, gently and silently, his expression now admitting prior knowledge.

“But it is my intention to finish the paper and publish…”

Mitchell allowed the pause to change the subject, despite his incongruous and wholly inappropriate use of a conjunction to effect his aim. “And I understand there has been a problem at the site…”

“Sarnu and I have fallen out. We are at rock bottom.” Wiseman actually smiled, possibly recalling his recent consultations with dictionaries of contemporary gay slang, which might just have offered an alternative interpretation of the phrase.

Mitchell by contrast was totally serious. It was his turn to open the folder he had brought to the meeting and extend the single sheet that he had previously placed on top of the other documents inside, knowing that, when it was required, ease of access and speedy delivery would be essential. It was a typed sheet on pre-printed, multicoloured headed note paper that sported

shields, emblems in red and white with decorative outlines in green.

Pitcairn obviously recognized immediately the large print letters at the head as the Bahasa Indonesia name of a government ministry. “I have received this from the Ministry of Culture. It is self-explanatory.” He passed the letter across to Pitcairn who scanned the text, focusing on the foot of the page.

“It says here there is a cc to me. I have not received it.”

“Perhaps it is back in Yogyakarta. It seems you had set off on your leave by the time it was posted to you.”

Pitcairn read the letter, which was surprisingly in English. It was couched in that stilted utterly prolix, formal language that Bahasa-speaking bureaucrats adopt to enhance the status of their pronouncements.

“I thought this might be coming…”

“Basically, Edward…” Mitchell’s resort to the forename was a calculated act of simultaneous solidarity and distance, a separation from the former professional relationship between the men which, as a result of the letter, clearly no longer existed and a simultaneous offer of solidarity via familiarity, which in other circumstances might be confused with friendship. “…they want you out. It says clearly that the ministry will offer no further support to your presence there. And without that support…”

“They will cut off the funding to you.”

“And to you.”

“And Sarnu?”

Mitchell shrugged. “That’s between them and him. Nothing to do with us. It seems there was an inspection…”

Pitcairn laughed. “A bureaucratic fart with all the imagination of a dead ant.”

Mitchell smiled. “Be that as it may… The report detailed ‘irregularities’ according to the letter, irregularities that called into question the competence of the foreign management and its willingness to uphold national rules.” Mitchell read from his own monochrome copy.

“Bullshit.”

It was Wiseman who spoke. “Professor Pitcairn, we live in a postcolonial world. We can no longer visit former colonies and expect to impose our values on local inhabitants. It is our duty always to respect local cultures, local traditions, local religions, and not discriminate against anyone on the basis of social class, race, gender or sexuality.”

“Frankly, they would like to chop the balls of gays… Nothing personal, of course. It’s all bullshit. Sarnu set this up. I know it. He wants me out.”

“Professor Pitcairn,” said Wiseman, adopting a tone that announced its intention to patronise, “it is the right of the people of Indonesia to make…”

“Oh, shut up. Don’t you dare claim you have the voice of the people of Indonesia! I’ve lived there a dozen years! Have you even visited the place you seem to claim as your own? Hmm? Hmm?” Pitcairn was incandescent with rage. Wiseman, wisely, did not react. “This has nothing to do with ‘people’ other than Onggo Sarnu. He

wants me out so he can stick his name onto a new species, a new species which ought to bear the label specious, because there is no evidence for it. And that's all! And it looks like he has succeeded. It seems I am on my way out in more ways than one!"

There was another long silence, this one uncomfortable for everyone present. Mitchell and Wiseman eyed one another, silently agreeing that the lull in proceedings had lasted too long. Both men looked at Debbie, who was twiddling her pen to pass the time, as if it were a marching band baton in miniature.

"Would you like me to get you some water, Professor Pitcairn?" Debbie asked.

Edward shook his head, but it was not a response to her question. He opened his file and began to search through the papers inside, without actually looking at any of the contents. It was Mitchell who spoke, quietly, not without sympathy for his colleague. "Do you intend to go back?"

Again, Edward Pitcairn shook his head. This time it was an answer. He was fighting tears. "No," he said, eventually, his single word seeming to ring through the silence. He paused again for what seemed like an age and then continued. "There's no time. I have to be here. I have… things to arrange…Gemma…the house…"

"Unfortunately, Edward," said Mitchell, "Dr. Wiseman has something to say."

Larry Wiseman took the hospital pass in his stride and began to issue what was clearly a rehearsed pitch. "Professor Pitcairn, you will be

aware that the status of your former department has been…shall we say…precarious. Student numbers have fallen, as has demand for the course. We have been unable to appoint…"

"That's because you have advertised teaching-only contracts for a discipline where anyone with the slightest competence is only interested in research! What do you expect? It wasn't an advert for a job. It was a dagger to kill off a discipline!"

"We have not been able to fund archaeological research for some time… other than, of course, your own project, which has largely been covered by the Ministry of Culture in Indonesia and the department in Yogyakarta."

"So, with me out of the way, there's no department left at Hackney Metro."

"What I was about to explain…"

"…was that archaeology will no longer be offered in any form at this university. My department is finished. You're closing it down."

"Your Emeritus status will be preserved," said Mitchell.

"Unlike the Emeritus, himself." Edward Pitcairn's expression looked suddenly tired, worn out, though still impatient. "I'll leave this with you," he said passing his now closed file over to Debbie. "And I suppose you'll be in touch."

Mitchell nodded and, in just a few short seconds, Edward Pitcairn had stood and walked as far as the door. "I know my way out," he said, as he left both the room and the institution where he had worked for forty years, never now to return.

Interview with Dr. Sarnu Onggo, Head of National Archaeology, University of Yogyakarta, Java, Indonesia, an encounter with Wendy Davis, features reporter, The News

´Honorary Hackney resident´ is how we have come to refer to Professor Sarnu Onggo, the Indonesian archaeologist. Now in his mid-forties, he is about to return to our borough not only as a part-time resident, but also now as an investor, since the family-owned business of which he is part is the leading light in constructing the planned Uking Palace project.

A diminutive man in terms of height, Sarnu is almost as broad as he his high and so cuts a powerful figure, a pocket battleship of restrained power. His round, moustachioed face with its chin strands of wispy beard is what might be described as full, his black, apparently oversized songkok always appearing to be precariously perched atop. His large, black-framed spectacles sit high on his nose, their thick, light sensitive lenses often revealing a purplish tinge, reminding us that they are usually worn in sunnier climes than ours. For all his contact with London, he still speaks his perfect English in that attractive Malay-speaker's accent, where some vowels seem unusually stretched between clipped consonants. Sarnu Onggo, above all, is aware of his status and position, and the power of his personality is almost tangible.

He began an extended visit to our shores last week, a visit during which he will spend most of his time at his alma mater, Hackney Metro

University, with whom his family's company is establishing a partnership. I caught up with him last Thursday for this interview, which we had to squeeze in between meetings.

Dr. Sarnu, please tell us first something about yourself and your family

It is very complicated... The sixties were a difficult time for my country and a very difficult time for my parents. I was born at the end of that decade, so I was never really exposed to those problems. But for my parents, the difficulties of the sixties became paramount and changed the assumptions they made about their lives. Previously they and their ancestors had lived mainly, perhaps exclusively within their Chinese culture. My family emigrated to Indonesia generations ago. Our oral history suggests we have been there since the eighteenth century, but in reality, none of us knows much about our family before about 1900. I personally knew my great grandparents, but the written records do not even go back beyond their childhood. The family had been successful as traders, really successful, even compared to other members of our community. But my parents described their status as that of living in a kind of ghetto. It was as if the wider society demanded that we stay within the narrow confines that were defined by them for us. The family business was tolerated and wider society engaged with it, but my parents say that we simply had no role in wider Indonesian society, and we were, like the rest of our community, regarded as a race apart from real Indonesians.

By the end of the sixties, there were new possibilities. My family changed their religion and their name. They wanted to integrate, to participate in the whole range of activities, cultural life, commerce, politics. It was at that time they began to widen the family's business interests, took on national partners, and so on. It was then that I came along. I was rather a late child for my parents.

And what about your education?

I was thus a member of the first generation of my family that did not exclusively go to Chinese school. I attended two sets of schools - perhaps three! One was a state school where I studied in Bahasa Indonesia and followed a national curriculum which, in those days, was more a function of the school you attended rather than countrywide prescriptions. I also went to Chinese school for the language, of course, but also for history and culture. My horizons were automatically totally different from those of my parents. What I have described illustrates that I was a member of the first generation of our family that grew up with a real choice to make about our careers. The past was no longer going to determine who I was and what I should do with my life.

What attracted you to your chosen discipline of archaeology?

Now I should remind you of what I said earlier. My family was consciously trying to integrate more with the wider, Indonesian society. We were participating in many activities for the first time and, at least for my parents, previously they had

not really wanted to do so. It was all relatively new, new for me, but also completely new for my parents, uncharted territory for them. I was the first of the family's sons to grow up speaking Bahasa on a par with Chinese. Until then my family had followed Chinese traditions, perhaps to the exclusion of others, often not even recognizing, let alone sharing the celebrations of the wider society. Frankly, I doubt whether my parents had ever visited other parts of Indonesia. They knew eastern Java and that was all. When I came along, accompanied by a new level of success for the business, we started going on family holidays to Bali, the Spice Islands, to Sulawesi. And it was on one of those trips that we visited a site where evidence of the Taolean Culture had only recently been excavated. And I must stress that, since I could speak Bahasa Indonesia both correctly and fluently and because I had also been to state school, I almost played the role of interpreter for them. They never did really become totally comfortable with the identity they had adopted.

I think I must also have been conscious of my cultural identity. I was Chinese. I was Indonesian. I spoke Bahasa. I spoke Mandarin, well it was more like Hakka, actually... I was Muslim. I was a child of Buddhist parents who had converted. I was rich. Others were poor. I was different, but yet shared a common identity with both the community of my birth and my adopted Indonesian nationality. I now saw Buddhist and Hindu temples in Bali, evangelical Christians touting bibles in the bus queues, and yet, here in

Sulawesi on that particular holiday, there was yet another identity, another culture, long gone, visible only in artefacts, bones and tools, that had provided people with a sense of being, a sense of community and a sense of belonging. Who were these people? How did they live? How did they organise their lives? Did they make art? Were they, like my parents, treated like a race apart? To say I was immediately fascinated would be an understatement.

I was full of questions. And luckily, my father was able to arrange for me to meet the team of archaeologists. They were Australian and it was a wonderful chance to practice my English. That was the third school I attended, incidentally, private English classes.

I went to that site every day of our holiday in Sulawesi. By the end of the week, I had received a crash course in practical research, had done some excavating of my own and had even found some objects, which the researchers allowed me to keep, once they had been photographed and catalogued, of course! I still have them, incidentally. They have pride of place in my personal collection. I had cave art explained to me. I had understood how stone tools could be classified according to the way they had been produced. What I learned from those wonderful Australians has stayed with me all my life. I can remember it like it was yesterday. And at the age of eight I was hooked.

I was taken in hand by a man named Clark. To this day I don’t know him by any other name. I don’t even know if Clark was his surname or his

first name! And try as I might over the years, I have never managed to trace him. He was probably not one of the academics, just a student or even a volunteer on a short-term visit to the dig. But it was that man who turned me into an archaeologist. After that experience, it was literally the only thing I ever wanted to do.

And just how did you end up in Hackney?

My family had assumed and continued to assume that I would join the business, perhaps via an MBA at Cornell, or an accountancy or law degree, but I suddenly had other ideas. For the rest of my secondary education, archaeology was the career I identified for myself, and I worked towards it with a single mind.

My family had always envisaged I would study abroad and in English. They clearly wanted me in the USA, but then I wanted to do archaeology and the qualifications I had did not meet what the US universities asked for. I tried Australia, but my parents did not think that would be suitable. Somehow, though I am not sure how, my application to Queensland brought a reply from Professor Edward Pitcairn, noting my interest in archaeology, and asking me if I or my family had considered London as a place to study. I remember my father clearly regarded the opportunity as a second best, but an acceptable second best. So, I went to London to study with Professor Pitcairn at Hackney Metro. I took a first and then stayed on for a doctorate. The rest you know.

And you have maintained that contact with London?

Very much so. I was here for six years as a student. Professor Pitcairn and I became very close friends as well as colleagues. He introduced me to many of London's hidden secrets, only some of them archaeological! He shared much of his Watulapitiyalu work with me, so I felt actively involved in his research, even in my undergraduate days. I owe everything I have become to my relationship with Edward Pitcairn, even my love of London.

And that involvement is about to take on a new dimension with Uking Palace?

Yes, and no. Yes, Uking Palace is a new initiative and a significant project, both for Hackney Metro and Uking Terbuka. But also, I must answer 'no', because I am not directly involved!

But it is a Uking Terbuka project and that is still a largely family business.

Yes, that is true. I am part-owner of the company, but I have no executive role, no part to play in day-to-day management or strategic decisions. My role is only that of a shareholder.

But a significant one…

It depends on what you consider 'significant'.

Around ten per cent?

I would not argue with that.

And you must realize that the development has become, shall we say, contentious?

As I said, I am not in a position to offer opinions on Uking affairs. I am not directly involved. But what I can say is that due process has been followed throughout. The project cannot be undertaken without proper consent and of

course the company is adhering to and will always adhere to the law. Uking Palace will contribute to the local economy, it will bring new people to the area who will enhance the community via the resources they bring, and all of this will secure a healthy and bright future for an expanding Hackney Metro University. It seems that everyone wins.

And can you confirm that Uking made a donation to a political party in return for the relaxation of planning rules?

Uking Terbuka is a private company, listed on the Djakarta Stock Exchange, with subsidiaries in several countries. Wherever it does business, the company adheres to the local law, whatever that law might be. It does not engage in politics or lobbying. As a commercial organization, we operate according to our international, global strategy and objectives, but always in accordance with local rules. In some countries, though not all, the rules allow us to donate to charitable causes, sometimes political parties, sometimes to state institutions that have the same goals as ourselves. Uking Terbuka is nothing special in this regard. We operate like every other company and always follow local rules. And - and I say this without reservation or apology - we, as a commercial operation, can and will continue to choose to support those who support us. This is not bribery, but it is recognition, perhaps gratitude. It is the way the world works.

But what about reports that company executives and their wives have made donations to political parties just to play golf with particular

individuals or to be photographed sitting next to them at private functions?

I am not aware of Uking Terbuka having done anything illegal. If you, personally, know something that I do not, then I suggest you publish it. We can check its veracity in the courts, if necessary.

And what about China?

I can state without further qualification that one fifth of the world's population and one sixth of the international economy is not involved within the limits of a student accommodation development in east London.

So there is no Chinese involvement?

Why do you ask the question? You, like anyone else, can read the official press releases. Uking Palace is a cooperative venture between Uking Terbuka, Hackney Metro University and a regional development fund in Xiamen. The relationship is declared explicitly on all published documents relating to the project, on all planning applications and is known to anyone willing to read. What precisely is your problem with this?

I did ask about Chinese involvement a moment ago and you did not answer the question.

You asked, "What about China?" and I answered. The country is not part of the construction project.

But you say there is a Chinese interest?

As I indicated, a partner in the project is a regional development fund in Xiamen. Hackney Metro University is also a partner. Does that make the whole project British?

It is the foreign interest that concerns local residents.

And the fact that, like the Dutch who colonised my country, the British sailed and marched across the globe, stealing, killing, and planting their sterile Union Jacks, does that never trouble you?

That was in the past.

Yes, but too often the ownership is still very much in the present. At least what we are doing here is legal, peaceful, declared and will be achieved without killing a single indigenous person, or indeed suppressing anyone's culture, unlike the practices in the British Empire. If you want a second opinion on the matter, I suggest you interview my old teacher and colleague, Professor Edward Pitcairn, on his attitude towards British colonial policies in Australia.

But what about the environmental impact of Uking Palace?

And building projects by British people do not have their own environmental impact, only those of foreigners? The environmental rules have been observed. The development is entirely legal. Planning applications have been made and published. We are doing everything according to British law. I repeat that Uking Palace will benefit everyone involved. It will assist the future development of Hackney Metro. It will help to bring prosperity to the area. It will assist further cooperation between east London and a wealthy, ambitious Chinese region, so there will be benefits in the future, both financial and cultural,

if the cooperation were to blossom into other areas.

But what do you say to those who are both concerned about the environment and also want to see local development?

We are all concerned about the environment. And there is no single way to look after it, no matter what particular interest groups want to claim. As an archaeologist, I can cite as many examples as you like of cultures that destroyed their environments, and also of cultures that were themselves destroyed by environmental change. If you think our culture in any different from those that preceded it, you are deluding yourself. The real difference is that now we also have science and technology. Human beings are perhaps the only animals who know for sure they are going to die, that their participation in time is temporary, that their dominion over the earth is characterized by stewardship, not ownership. If we all follow good practice and observe the constraints on our behaviour that creates, then we can all benefit. And as for local control, it is an illusion. We live in a world where cooperation between people and countries, between those wishing to develop commercial partnerships is not only inevitable, but also desirable. I became the person I am, a friend of Britain, a friend of Hackney Metro, and a successful archaeologist because of such cooperation. I am about to give my name to a previously unknown species of human being, and that name will forever be linked to a relationship that developed across countries, generations, institutions and cultures. I

am eternally grateful for the opportunity that Professor Pitcairn and Hackney Metro gave me. And the links created in the future by our development will benefit everyone, you, me, the university, the community and the environment, which, in the case of Uking Terbuka's development of the particular area of east London, is definitely going to be improved. The area was and is still in a state of dilapidation and dereliction. And it has been in that state for a generation or more. So much for local concern…

Thank you, Professor Sarnu, for your detailed and truthful answers to difficult questions. Is there anything you would like to add?

Yes. I hope I have made the position of Uking Terbuka clear. But I have to stress that I speak not on behalf of the company, but only myself. And, as myself, as Sarnu Onggo, graduate of Hackney Metro University, friend of London, Professor of Archaeology, Indonesian nationalist but at the same time citizen of the world, I have one last announcement to make here. The News is a national newspaper, I know, but it is not an inappropriate place for me to make a statement to all residents of Hackney, Bethnal Green, Whitechapel, Wapping, Bow, Stratford and beyond. I would like to take this opportunity to claim that the Uking Palace development has the potential to make a significant difference to the profile of the whole area, especially in how it is perceived by people from East Asia who may be considering a move to London. The development is nothing less than prestigious and our company's goal is to raise the profile of the whole

area of east London with a view to continuing and perhaps further investment. And, in honour of the project's status, and also in honour of the origins of my family's connection to Hackney, Uking Terbuka will announce tomorrow that it's joint venture with Hackney Metro will henceforth be named, in honour of my great, great mentor, Pitcairn Towers.

Riots after demo in Hackney by Tanya Reddie

Hackney Post, 14 June 2021

Police sirens sounded throughout Saturday night in Hackney following ongoing clashes between protesters. Disorder also spilled across the border into Stratford and there were reports of trouble from as far away as Bow. No official casualty figures have been released, but our sources indicate that at least twenty people were admitted to local emergency departments, with at least three of the cases being described as ‘serious’.

The trouble arose after a legally organised demonstration turned violent. Organizers of the event have been quoted as blaming the disturbances on members of a counterdemonstration who, they claim, had infiltrated the event with the intention of disrupting it.

A march on behalf of Off Uking Palace (OUP) had been granted official sanction and was planned to take place on Saturday afternoon. Speaking on behalf of the organising committee, former Labour London Assembly Member, Daisy Johnson, said they had promised to observe social distancing and also claimed that they had provided their own stewards in sufficient numbers to supervise the event. OUP is a loose grouping of organisations opposed to the Uking Palace development in Hackney. They claim the development will have a severe environmental impact on the area, will threaten local wildlife

and exacerbate local housing shortages. The developers, Uking Terbuka, an Indonesian conglomerate with links to China claim their project has been subjected to all planning rules. The company states further that their own environmental impact assessment finds that their development will have positive effects on the environment.

The march was due to assemble in East Park at 2pm, proceed immediately on a circular route through the borough and return to the park at around 4pm to hear speeches. Because of restrictions imposed by social distancing rules, the march organisers were instructed by police to limit the number of participants to one hundred and fifty. Around 200 people did assemble as planned and, though over the march's legal limit, they set off on the route. The march proceeded without reported problems for the length of its prescribed route.

By the time the march re-entered East Park, however, there were an estimated 500 people in attendance. It is possible that the increase in attendance came from supporters of the rally who simply did not want to take part in the march but did want to hear the speeches at the end. Alternatively, as the event organizers claim, these new attendees may have been representatives of groups who opposed the march and its goals.

Even out of doors, Covid rules demanded social distancing and, it was clear to everyone, these were not being respected by the crowd. Before any speeches had begun, therefore, police intervened to declare the gathering illegal. The

police officers did not attempt to arrest anyone, however, preferring merely to ask those in attendance to disperse and leave the site. The OUP organizers complained that they had permission to conduct a public meeting and announced to officers that they intended to continue with their speeches. The police rejected their request and continued to ask those assembled to disperse.

It was at this point that the OUP organizers took matters into their own hands and announced from the podium that the crowd should not comply with the police instructions, that they should stay put and wait for the planned proceedings to continue. The police response was to enter the podium itself and attempt to detain the organisers who, by their defiance of the instruction to disperse, were deemed to be acting illegally. Via the event's public address system, one of the organisers, Elsie Pitcairn, accompanied by a male colleague, who was not introduced by name to those assembled and appeared to be directing proceedings, encouraged OUP supporters to resist the calls to move on. This prompted the crowd to initiate abusive chants against the police.

It was at this point that reports of what happened start to differ. OUP supporters claim that the chanting and abuse came from that portion of the march that had joined at the end, comprising, they claim, members of groups opposed to OUP's goals. OUP supporters claim that the march had been infiltrated not only by those opposed to the Uking Palace development,

but also by white supremacist groups and others representing different political groups who attended merely to disrupt. It was these latter, unnamed and unidentified groups whom the organisers of the march blamed for the outbreak of violence, when fights began to break out amongst the crowd at approximately 4:45pm.

During the following twenty minutes, there occurred what one of the police officers attending described as ‘mayhem’. Groups of people fought and chased one another across the park. Before 5:30pm, some of these disorderly groups had spilled out into nearby streets. Shop windows were smashed, a number of houses belonging to innocent people who were not themselves involved in the march in any way were attacked with stones. Before 6:30pm, two cars had been overturned, one of which was set on fire.

The police were criticized by local residents for their slow response. “For an hour it seemed that they just let the mob do as they wished,” claimed one resident, whose front windows had been smashed. The police later issued a statement in which they claimed that their presence at the march was proportional and had been agreed with the OUP organisers at a level that would not be perceived as provocative or threatening. When violence flared, police commanders did not have sufficient resources nearby to effect an immediate response. The delay perceived by residents was merely a reflection of the time needed to move reinforcements into the area.

The officer in charge stated that in his opinion the violence had been caused by people who were

attending the demonstration. When asked to comment on the identity of those involved, specifically whether there might be infiltrators, he said that, as far as the police were concerned, they were required by law to ask the demonstration to disperse, and that violence had broken out as a result of the crowd's reluctance to comply with instructions. He said they had been faced with an unruly mob, with problems arising out of the mass of people attending the event and not from any specific or identifiable groups. The officer pointed out that it was not the job of the police to identify the political associations of individuals. As far as the authorities were concerned, they had been presented with a body of people apparently all attending the same function, a function which, by then, was illegal, because it had exceeded the number of participants for which permission had been granted. The march organisers, said that same senior officer at the scene, were encouraging defiance. When violence flared, the police had to deal with it accordingly and appropriately, so they might bring an end to the disturbance, whoever might have caused it and for whatever reason.

By 6pm the general lawlessness and violence had spread in three directions, west, south and east. The main problems were experienced in Hackney, but there were reports of antisocial behaviour from Stratford shopping centre and as far away as Bow. In Hackney town centre, two shops were looted. An off licence was ransacked and a sports shop had items stolen from its

window display. Stratford shopping centre declared an emergency and security staff were deployed. Alarms sounded, but almost immediately, according to eyewitnesses, the perpetrators dispersed, obviously aware that they might be locked in the building behind the automatic doors and then detained. Shoppers described how a number of young males with their faces obscured by masks, scarves and balaclavas had ‘steamed’ through the shopping centre. Several elderly people describe being knocked to the ground as the group pushed people indiscriminately. The disturbance lasted for barely five minutes before alarms sounded and the perpetrators fled.

The violence in Hackney continued sporadically thought the night. Local residents describe a sleepless night as police sirens sounded. Reports of unrest came in from several streets on both sides of Mare Street, which itself stayed relatively calm after the initial shop looting. Police have recorded ten separate incidents, but no arrests were made since the perpetrators again fled as soon as alarms were sounded. There are unconfirmed reports that a man was stabbed soon after dawn.

As we go to press, the story is still developing. The violence has died down, but now the inquest into exactly how and why the situation developed must begin. After a scuffle on the podium in East Park, police moved in and detained the event’s organiser, Elsie Pitcairn, 26, of Highbury, an employee of Xenon Media. She is charged with resisting arrest.

Xenon Media Inc

Minutes of observation and appraisal meeting

Date and time - June 18 2021, 10:30

Present J Harris (recorder), W Singleton (director), F Wariuki (director), P Manze (executive director), Indra It (owner)

Agenda - Management appraisal of Annie Kuroshi, salary review and contract status

Task - Employee discipline

Format - Annie Kuroshi and the staff member in question occupied the adjoining room, which had its own separate entrance. There was adequate soundproofing, so no deliberation originating from the observing group could be heard by either party. The five participants listed above watched proceedings on live video. Occasionally Ms Harris was directed by the observers to include extra remarks and she has included these as comments alongside the recorded dialogue. The decision to be communicated had already been taken by the directors. It was Ms Kuroshi’s task to communicate it. Associated documentation, therefore, had already been prepared. The purpose of the exercise was thus specifically the appraisal of Ms Kuroshi.

The meeting room next door was set up as usual, with the standard-issue furniture, a plain

office table and two chairs. No changes had been made to the room's decor, which meant that the only object on display was the large abstract painting that habitually hangs in the room. Final arrangements of the furniture were left to Ms Kuroshi. She chose to place both chairs on one side of the table on the window side, opposite the door. The painting was thus on her left when she occupied the left-hand chair, meaning that the employee would be facing the painting when addressing her. Afterwards, Ms Kuroshi stated that her idea was that the employee should not be facing a blank wall. The employee knocked and entered the room at precisely 10:30.

AK Hi, Elsie. Good to see you. Thanks for coming on time.

EP I usually do. What's this all about? If it's about the Clifftop Project, I'll have to go and get the file…

AK Don't worry. It's not about Clifftop. It's about… well… something else.

EP Elsie's something else. I've been saying it for ages.

AK Very good.

There was an extended pause here while Ms Kuroshi rearranged her papers. Mr Manze asked for it to be recorded, noting that it might indicate that Ms Kuroshi had not completely prepared her opening remarks. The pause seemed to be an unnecessary loss of momentum in her delivery.

AK I'll come straight to the point. I suppose you have seen this.

Ms Kuroshi took from the pink folder before her on the table a photocopy of the article from

the Hackney Post. At the top of the article was a poorly copied, almost solarised photo of Elsie Pitcairn being led away from East Park with her hands flexicuffed together, her hands apparently fixed at the level of her stomach since both arms were being held at the elbow, though not tightly, by the female police officers on either side.

EP Of course I have…

AK …and this? And this?

Ms Kuroshi placed four more photocopied A4 sheets on the table, arranging their edges neatly so no table surface showed through between them. One showed the same photograph beneath the headline ‘Hackney Riots’ and followed the format expected on an internet-based news site, with hyperlinks on the right of the page greyed out on the monochrome copy from their original blue. The other sheets contained copies of what were clearly cuttings from print newspapers, short columns of text apparently lost and waywardly wandering in the blank white of the sheet, with their attributions written in ballpoint across the top. One read ‘Telegraph’, the other ‘Guardian’ and both carried the date 16 June scribbled in oversized handwriting. On each of the four documents, every occurrence of the name Elsie Pitcairn had been highlighted in green. Also highlighted, but in pale red, was each occurrence of the name, Xenon Media.

Ms Pitcairn took some time to study the articles. Clearly, she had seen them all before. She was obviously flash reading each one, noting carefully where each highlight had been placed.

AK The main article, the long one from the Hackney newspaper states that you have been charged with resisting arrest. Is this true?

EP I have been charged, yes. But I expect it will be dropped when the dust settles. It was all a misunderstanding. We had permission for the meeting and the march. It will all become clear.

AK But Elsie, you are not charged with holding an illegal gathering, or with breaking Covid rules. You are charged with resisting arrest. My understanding of that charge is that once it is made, it will have to go through due process. That will mean a hearing of some sort. Will you plead guilty?

EP Of course not! I…

AK Just to be clear…

Here Mr Wariuki asked me to note that Ms Kuroshi should not have interrupted. An opportunity for Ms Pitcairn to provide her own version of events was therefore lost.

AK …you are not disputing that you were arrested? And are you disputing that the charge against you is ‘resisting arrest’?

EP Annie, it says that in black and white in the text. What kind of game are you playing?

AK I just want both of us to be clear, that’s all. Please, Elsie, please tell me why you got yourself arrested.

All the directors remarked on Ms Pitcairn’s change of manner. She suddenly became quite agitated, even angry. One specific comment was that this was a sure indication of her guilt.

EP Annie, you know full well that I have been involved with Off Uking Palace for a year or

more. You have even been to meetings with me! You are fully aware of the issues, the environmental impact, the concreting over of spaces that are currently quite wild, the demolition of community facilities, not to mention the political favours, the corruption, the kickbacks and bribes. It stinks more than most sewers.

AK Elsie, my question was not about why you were there in Hackney East Park or why you had organized the march. My question was, “Why did you get arrested?”

EP Because a fucking pig cuffed me! Isn’t it obvious?

AK “Pig…” very seventies.

The diversion was noted by management as unnecessary.

EP The police told me the speeches could not go ahead. I told them I had written permission to hold the meeting, the march and the speeches. I had even dug out the official document from my bag. I was in the process of showing it to one of them when another police officer came up and announced that there was a scuffle in the crowd. The guy I was talking to started to walk away, presumably to check on what he had just been told. I was livid. It is what you expect from a policeman when he’s confronted with a woman. You are never more than the second most important thing on his mind after groping you. The guy just started to walk away, having specifically asked me to show him the permission. I had it, right there in my hand, and he just ignores me, barges past me, and sets off with his

mate away from the stage. I was livid! It was as if I no longer existed!

AK And so you grabbed his arm.

EP All I did was take a half a dozen steps quicker than him so I could face him and then try to insist he look at the document he had just asked for. I was trying to get him to read our permission.

AK …and then…

EP He barged past me again. So, I grabbed at his hand and tried to make him take hold of the paper. He told me that physical contact with an officer was an offense. I said I wanted him to read the paper, not fuck me. He then turned, pushed me to the ground, sat on me and put the cuffs on, saying all the usual stuff about anything I said and all that shit.

AK …anything you say will be taken down…

EP I know, trousers… It's an old one…

The directors all commented here on the inappropriateness of the remark. They felt unanimously that Ms Kuroshi had allowed her personal relationship with Ms Pitcairn to surface at a time when nothing could be gained from the tactic. AK quickly regained her business voice and successfully re-established the gravity of the meeting.

AK But then why did you bring in the company name?

EP Look, Annie, I have no idea whatsoever where that came from. At the time in the park, all that was said was the usual. "I'm arresting you…", "You are not obliged…" and all that shit. From start to finish, from the moment I started

my dash after the policeman to the taking of that photo as I am being led away to the van, no more than a minute and a half had elapsed. It was all very fast, spur of the moment stuff. I never consciously thought, “Oh let’s throw in the name of my employer.” It was all over in a flash and the only thing at issue was the document giving us the right to protest, march and make speeches. But obviously by then, the police had already heard the alarm about the fighting. They were all on their walkie-talkies, or whatever they’re called. They just wanted me out of the way. But I wasn’t moving until that stupid officer had looked at the document he had asked for. I never said anything to anyone at the time of the arrest. There wasn’t time! And, frankly, I was being held down on the ground, with a big fat arse squashing my tits. I wasn’t in any sort of position to engage in conversation about my job!

AK So when were you asked about where you worked?

EP That was later, half an hour later, after I arrived in the police station. I had to make a statement, which was typed as I spoke. I gave my name, address, date of birth all that stuff, and then I was asked if I was employed. I said, “Yes” and they asked me where I worked. So, I told them. I have absolutely no idea where the reporter got that information. The company name will have been recorded on my statement, but that should have been seen only by the police. The reporter must have been given access to my statement, or the officers I spoke to must have told her. That, I think, is illegal and so the case

against me is likely to be thrown out. She must know someone on the inside. Either that, or else someone has recognised me, a professional contact who also happens to know that particular reporter or someone else who works on that newspaper. I told no one except the police officer, who said the information was needed to complete my statement.

AK I'm afraid it's a problem…

The management team remarked here that Elsie Pitcairn looked confused, as if she had no idea whatsoever that this could have negative implications for her employer or indeed herself.

EP I don't really understand what the problem is. There's no such thing as bad publicity…

AK Well in this case, Elsie, it is seen as precisely that, bad publicity. There is even one piece…

Annie Kuroshi again paused, this time to locate the exact document that would make her point. She selected one of the longer photocopied articles.

AK …here, this one, where the company is described as staffed by drug-taking, bonus-obsessed Islington yuppies who are intent on foisting their ideas on other people. It's not good copy for a company that is trying to promote other people's products in the media.

It was Elsie Pitcairn's turn to insert a pause. Her mind was clearly turning over multiple possibilities. She was rather taken aback by the article, having obviously just seen it for the first time.

EP So I am going to get disciplined, is that it? Told off for being a naughty girl? Isn't it enough that I have been manhandled unnecessarily, falsely accused, and libelled? One of those articles even uses the word 'agitator' to describe my work with the campaign. It's disgraceful…

AK Elsie, you work with the media. You know what happens.

There was an extended pause here. One of the directors whispered. "…the penny has dropped".

EP Annie, let's just get something clear… You aren't about to say that… Bad publicity… Are you trying to tell me…?

AK Xenon is going to let you go, Elsie.

EP Let me go? What if I don't want to?

AK That is not an option.

There was another silence, during which the general consensus in the evaluation group was that overall, despite a couple of inconsistencies, Ms Kuroshi had handled things very skilfully, not actually saying the word 'sack' or 'redundant' but still communicating the message so effectively that Ms Pitcairn had absorbed the substance of the message before she had even been told anything explicit. We watched as Ms Kuroshi opened her pink folder again. She gathered the article copies together and replaced them into the pocket file and, in the same movement, extracted an A5 brown envelope and handed it to her former colleague. Elsie looked at the front of the thin envelope for a few seconds and then read out the single typed word she could see.

EP Elsie.

AK It’s got your P45, a reference, a cheque for your month’s salary plus a generous bonus and a letter of resignation. I would like you to sign that for me now and then I’ll make a quick copy.

EP You can take as long as you like. I have nothing on…

Ms Pitcairn extracted the single sheet that was the folded letter. Without even bothering to read it, she reached across to the central desk tidy, took a pen and signed the paper.

AK Thanks, Elsie. I’ll make a copy as we go out. And one thing more, thanks for making this easier for me. It’s not easy…

EP I’ll try harder next time, Annie.

As Ms Kuroshi and Ms Pitcairn rose from their seats and left the room, a very quick straw poll of the assembled group concluded that Ms Kuroshi had handled things very well and it was resolved to offer her a new contract with an associated regrading.

Are black faces being used to whitewash the Brexit debate? - lodged in articlesyouneed.com, 16 July 2016

Openly racist slogans are currently being made respectable by a procession of black faces parading through the media. I apologize, profusely, to anyone I may have angered by using colour as a badge of ethnicity, as an identifier of race. I, myself, am a sociologist and specialist in the media, so shouldn't I be more than aware - downright self-conscious! - about using disrespectful, stereotypical, inaccurate and frankly abusive labels to make my point? Well, yes, except that it's those very labels that form an integral part of the certainly unwritten and probably also unsaid arguments that are fuelling the Brexit debate, arguments that are, as a consequence of the identity of those promoting them, rendered palatable, even acceptable, when they should be judged the reactionary, even fascist pronouncements of white supremacists. Except, of course, these particular protagonists are not white, hence this attempt to illustrate how the unpalatable is being sold from behind a protecting veil, a disguise, of ethnicity.

We have all become used to how facts have been presented via the distorting mirrors of the Brexit debate. We know that our country does not contribute three hundred and fifty million pounds a week to the European Union. It is a blatant lie. The people who quote the figure, even distinguished politicians, know it's a lie and yet they still use it, increasingly without challenge.

Even government departments deny it, but they find themselves either gagged, unreported or dismissed as establishment Remainers by people who should and, in fact, do know better. Mere repetition seems to be the weapon that persuades us to accept this false message.

Another lie relates to the status of Turkey, with its eighty million people, who, we are told authoritatively, are *en masse* about to become full members of the Union and, within days, arrive in Hemel Hempstead and buy all the houses. We know that is utterly false. There is no prospect of Turkey joining the European Union in the near or even the distant future. How many times have we all been told the falsehood by people who ought to know better? But when was the last time you heard it said? And even more important, when was the last time you heard this challenged? Let us all try telling the truth to campaigners who quote it as fact and, somehow, obtain respectable media coverage for the truth.

Let's note also how a migration figure of less than two hundred thousand a year suddenly became two hundred and fifty thousand, according to some fabrications, only then to be quoted as a town the size of Newcastle, which has almost three hundred thousand inhabitants. We may conclude that conveniently inflating numbers by sixty per cent is thus quite acceptable for those on that particular side of the argument. And this is just a selection of the lies that together form the now accepted and digested false consciousness that is Brexit. And it

is still being peddled, deliberately and, I would argue, calculatedly by black faces.

The true message contained in these misleading arguments is that, really, the idea that Britain, usually not the United Kingdom, would be better unpolluted by these foreigners with their foreign ways, who have invaded our politics, economy and society. It is a euphemism for a specifically British, perhaps more specifically English form of white supremacism. And it's an ideology that is being perpetrated by a procession of media and political figures who themselves hail from ethnic minorities. They do tend, it has to be said, to be members of one particular political party, but not exclusively so. A member of parliament, after all, needs to keep local electors happy and there are some elected representatives from Leave voting areas on both sides of the political divide who are covering their backs by pragmatically supporting ideas that they themselves find abhorrent. But whether they be born of West African, West Indian, Asian, African Asian or indeed Middle Eastern roots, it is this possession of black and ethnic minority identity that is effectively whitewashing the argument. How can it be racism when BAME people support it?

Now I have written about this elsewhere, so here is not the place to trawl through detail. Anyone so disposed can access the complete discussion in my book, "The Sale of Ideology: Marketing Political Ideas via the Techniques of Consumer Capitalism, an Analysis of Diverse Media" whose rather prolix title hides a

deceptively simple and certainly easy read. In it I argue that, contrary to popular belief, the end of the Cold War was not an end to the battle of ideologies, but rather its beginning. The false dichotomy of a Capitalist West and a Communist East was merely a convenient way of labelling a post-World War Two scenario where professed allies were effectively still at war, competing over the ownership of Europe. And, since at the end of the War the European colonial powers effectively still controlled most of the world, the competition was immediately and permanently global. Both the United States and the Soviet Union had demanded that the defeated colonial powers divest themselves of their empires, and Churchill, on behalf of the defeated, accepted that inevitable reality at Potsdam and Yalta, not that he was given a choice. But both still-warring powers continued their competition to gather into their sphere the taken pieces as they were removed from the stalemate chessboard. What the Capitalist West had which the Communist East did not was, however, control of resources and, eventually, this was the crucial factor that always was going to deliver victory if those resources – chiefly markets, not commodities – could still be controlled politically.

But in the seventies and eighties, there was a distinct shift in both sides of the ideological debate. Capitalism, which previously had been associated with profit for specific nations in competition with other nations, suddenly appreciated the advantages of globalization. If resources were really the key that drove

prosperity, then in order to secure those resources, ruling classes and capitalists from countries who owned those resources had to be co-opted into the global system. The powerful, in order to increase their power, had to learn to share their power across borders, but of course only with those who lived by the same accumulating assumptions as themselves. This brought the lie to the famous and much-parodied cartoon, in which the proud British, atop the economic pile, regarded themselves as both richer and superior to all other races. God, who was above the summit of the pyramid, worked His directing magic via the Queen and then the aristocracy. Even the white poor, at least those who deserved, were somewhere in the middle, much elevated above anything that walked on four legs, crawled or swam in the sea, certainly above anything dark skinned or non-Christian.

This new analysis, however, raised the status of precisely those people who had previously been colonial subjects. Not only did their nations have the desired resources, but they were also the next generation's markets, without which the expansion of globalised profitability would founder. Thus, their elevation began. The myth of British superiority had, of course, to be retained for sale to those who would find themselves relegated from their previously privileged positions, especially the white working-class British, but also the working-class white German and French, and, indeed, eventually the working-class white American. It was a transformation that suggested Marx's original analysis of class

formation eventually trumping ethnicity or nationality would prove correct.

Which is a good place to switch the argument to the other half of the ideological divide. Also, in the seventies and eighties, aware of the likelihood of defeat in the post-World War Two standoff, Communists and Marxists in general returned to the study of the original postulates of the philosophy of socialism. They concluded that Marx's ideas had been corrupted by Lenin, who tricked supporters into believing that colonialism was the same as capitalism and by Mao, whose romanticised fish in the sea cast the rural poor as prime movers in revolution, in direct contradiction to Marx's original analysis. Reinventing Marxism involved returning to the original text and re-discovering its arguments. Bill Warren's Imperialism Pioneer of Capitalism was one of the products of this re-evaluation, a book whose very title parodied to nonsense Lenin's justification of the Russian Revolution. Suddenly, Marxists declared they believed in the same things as capitalists, mass consumption, profit, industrialization and globalization. And they did so not because they had suddenly been converted to the ideology of the political right, but because these ideas were clearly stated by Marx as necessary stages that economies would have to live through in order to progress to socialism. Lenin's by-pass always was the wrong road that led nowhere.

Thus, there arose, about thirty years ago with the fall of the Soviet Union, a clear consensus between political left and right that the only

route forward was a shared route, despite the two ideological sides individually still believing that this single road was destined to lead to different places. “And what about China?” I hear the audience shout. Capitalism first, second and third, and then more capitalism was the essence of Deng Xiaoping’s transformation of the party ideology, a pattern which is still being successfully followed. They may be in a different car, but they are certainly travelling the same road and in the same direction, so there will be no head-on collisions.

We seem to have come a long way from racism and Brexit, but in fact we have reached the point of synthesis. Given this concordance of approach, if not end product, between left and right, the political ideology that became squeezed out of the Brexit debate was social democracy. Indeed, it is in danger of becoming squeezed out of the general mainstream of political debate. In the post-War years, it came to be seen as the traditional old order, the inevitably messy establishment of consensus behind more egalitarian, more communal solutions to economic management and societal organisation. For a generation after World War Two, social democracy delivered a peaceful, largely pain-free route to renewed prosperity, at least for those lucky enough to inhabit the developed world.

But this backyard was proving too restricting for Capitalists who had grander ambitions and bigger appetites. Resources first, markets second became priorities for inclusion into the club and certainly the latter’s potential was far greater

than the now messy Old World. Social democracy however, still stressed equality, at least of opportunity, and, at least in popular parlance, the greater sharing of prosperity. These ideas were, of course, anathema to the newly motivated libertarians, who sought to elevate individual merit to the justification of privilege, encourages competition and the accumulation of personal wealth and thus effectively render the working classes of the Old World into the undeserving, unless they could prove themselves worthy. The ideology was sold to an eager public who had become so used to their status elevated by colonialism that they took it for granted and they lapped it up. Individualism had triumphed via an alliance of political left and right, with the communal, the societal and the shared being the vanquished. It's what Marxists call false consciousness. It is a patronising standpoint, but, at least, it explains the world as we perceive it!

This is why social democratic parties throughout the world, having driven the post-war economic miracle, suddenly became unelectable. This is the reason why certain groups in Britain undermined the Labour party, why Thatcherite individuality could be described, mainly by those who opposed it, as pure Marxism. The consensus of Left and Right was based on the Left's desire to allow the excesses of capitalism to define economic classes more distinctly, thereby promoting the conditions for revolution, and the Right's belief in the ideology of individual freedom, leading to a libertarian utopia where

merit would be rewarded. Same road, different destinations.

So, when it came to Brexit, both left and right looked at the essentially social democrat, post-war alliance of states and, for their own different reasons, opposed it. And they prevailed. But the tactic they employed, politically subtle, ideologically objectionable, was to reinvent that cartoon pyramid where Britishness was special, elevated by right, secure in its foundation, which of course was trampling on everyone else on the planet. Like many other assertions of the Brexiteers, it was a lie, but a persuasive one and, as it transpired, a successful one.

Sold in nineteenth century terms, however, with white races literally elevated above all others and with the British at their perceived rightful top, it would have been rightly dismissed as racist. The assumption that non-white, non-Christians were below the British in the natural order of creation had to be repackaged for a new era where many of the voters were themselves ethnic minorities, immigrants or of mixed race. And, except for minority religions and a small minority of others, the population was now not only non-Christian but also godless, so the summit of the pyramid could be left to disappear into an anonymous mist, the old god no longer saleable. So, who better to peddle the falsehoods generated by Brexit than members of those very groups who were to be elevated in the general order of things, at least ideologically? Who better to sell the lie than a coterie of black faces who can apparently deliver an apology for racism?

Here we reach our summary. I will not list the names. The faces have become familiar in recent times, when we have witnessed a procession of ethnic minority apologists for Brexit, willing to peddle lies in order to achieve a political victory of a deception, that the generality of working-class people will eventually benefit from an individuality that can only leave most of them vulnerable. The people who will suffer, of course, are all those people who once benefitted from the rise of social democracy, which was everyone. The people who gain are those who race along that one road towards imagined, different destinations, the Left seeking conflagration, the right individual merit that will extend only as far as the medal places.

This has to be more than a valediction, but a goodbye it is. A goodbye to whom is a significant question, because my blog over the years has never achieved regularity, let alone ‘viral’ status, each entry being accessed by a good dozen faithful followers, only some of whom have even a passing interest in what I write. The rest just want to sell me something. If you have read my words in the past, thank you for showing an interest in my work. Like all human activity, my writing was conducted with no awareness of whether its significance would be anything other than personal, with no conscious effort to appeal to its audience, whoever they might be, with no ulterior motive. It was always born of a need to communicate, a need I have always felt, but a goal I have always found I had to strive only ever to partially achieve. I also dedicated it to the infinitive split, just to annoy the Disgusted Tunbridge Wells grammarians, who trawl the language of their lives in search of something that might annoy them. But as a valediction, there is a need to get something off my chest, as we used to say before Covid, to register something for posterity that cannot be expressed another way, at least not in the short time I am told I have.

I have just a few weeks, perhaps days to live. Like anyone, I suppose, I am not party to the schedule, but I am its destination, and the buffers at the end of the track are now in sight. I might have enough time to write again, but the decision

is made. I am a man of my word, and this will be the last entry. Whatever time remains I must devote to my family and my work, since both seem in need of attention, both suffering from the same human frailty, that of duplicity. “All is fair in love and war,” I was once taught to recite, though the teacher never believed the phrase that was only ever used ironically, to signify that some behaviour had actually fallen short of what we normally accept as human, certainly well short of anything seen as ‘fair’ or ‘just’ or indeed anything that was ever born of the undeclared warfare that is love.

It remains a characteristic of the perspicacious human, perhaps retained from genes that were moulded by a different way of life, to seek short-term advantage. Feed and breed are both apparently rewarded by a competitive edge, while tire and expire remain longer term, an unwanted destiny. Perhaps that is why we are willing to shun tomorrow for the sake of gratification today. What is the point of assisting the inevitable?

The remnants of human life are all that are left to me. I hesitate to call them dregs. Of course, we must try to ignore the immediate, to take the longer view, to promote that which will benefit humanity, that elusive characteristic, a quality that is so rarely demonstrated by the animals included in its collective label. Only the consequence remains. A fight over food leaves one human dead and one alive, soon to die. The conflict, the winning, the losing, are nothing when compared to the consumption, which would

have happened anyway, though perhaps in a different way. And, when long-term consequences of that assumption need to be assessed, ask the planet. With limited time remaining, I have lost interest in anything short-term, and perhaps the longer-term is to be denied me, permanently. Perhaps I am becoming obsessed with the unattainable… Perhaps that is what we all do, probably all of the time, but especially at the end of life.

At least this is true of individuals, though perhaps does not hold for societies and cultures. Perhaps those that survive compete more effectively, more successfully. Perhaps survival is for 'the fittest', the just analysis that appeals most to assumptions that have been planted in the human psyche, since the alternative of 'better adapted' removes any conscious individual human agency from the process. And it is this idea, perhaps, that fundamentally differentiates archaeology from history, since the latter must consider motive, tactic, success or failure, while the former merely records the eventual summary state of the community, within which all participants have shared the same destination, apparently uninfluenced by the passing detail of everyday life, though remains of the communally mundane provide our sole source of evidence. We diggers do not care who won or who might have lost, let alone why, if that ever be a valid question, because we are only interested in the 'what', the summary end product. An identified individual, especially one that is traceable across the lives of others, will make your own name,

forever locate the pool of knowledge you have created as your own but, for an archaeologist, the individual find is no more than one more entry in a database of evidence, an anonymous but counted individual, where individuality is thus ideologically denied. In my career, I have never achieved such celebrity. Like any individual find, my career will only ever be added to the generality of things.

I find I have just argued a fundamental point. The short term is the only aspect of our lives that human agency can influence. It was Keynes who said, “In the long term we are all dead”, but the argument goes beyond mere comparison. “Plant pears for your heirs” was the fruit farmer’s proverb, because nature herself demanded that the rewards would inevitably be deferred. But when we, as humanity, allow individuality and personality to dominate over collective identity, such as culture or community, we have precisely no incentive to consider anything other than the here and now. The longer-term always hides behind more immediate personal priorities, the uneventful sum of miniscule change, and it is this that gives rise to environmentalist oxymorons such as, “How can I consume more sustainably?” I apologise for the dissolute nature of my thought… I am finding concentration increasingly hard.

In my current state, where a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer spread widely throughout my body predicts nothing but the short term for me, paradoxically it is posterity that becomes my obsession. Only the longer-term can now offer a

sensation of victory, itself a short-term gratification felt on the perceived achievement, perhaps illusory, of a long-term goal. Personally, I never did seek permanence. The fact that my name, Edward Pitcairn, became associated with Watulapitiyalu and indigenous Australian culture was a mere by-product of an immediate involvement. We live, we love, we make love, we eat, drink and be merry and, in the end that combined experience, if experienced, takes us to the next day which, when we are honest with ourselves, is the only diurnal we have. It is only, paradoxically, when that goal is denied, or we decide to intellectualise the process that anything beyond tomorrow might enter the argument.

Yes, in my work there was a long view, but that seemed to develop only in retrospect, after the daily grind of work had revealed its accumulated finds, after the here and now and its experience had satisfied its needs. And then, just like an artist's self-portrait must consciously reconstruct an imagined mirror image to place the brush in the correct hand, but probably leaves the face inverted, it is perhaps the later intellectual involvement with the short-term evidence that generates the perhaps illusory image of permanent conclusion or, more fundamentally, of a mere encounter with truth. The schema is constantly under review, but once crystallized it becomes knowledge, something to help us formulate judgment and to endure, but only, like the humans that created it, until it wears out, only until it is itself replaced by someone else's clearer, longer, perhaps better view.

So, it becomes apparent that not only the find, itself, is important. Not only does evidence need to be amassed, but it needs to be assembled in context, in an environment where it might potentially make sense. Something uncovered before its significance can be assessed is worthy only of dismissal. It becomes an irrelevance, since it does not fit into any known pattern and, because it has no relation to any known reality, it cannot convey even its own significance. And no matter what that potential significance might be, it can only be realized by later interpretation which begins by rejecting the original reasons for dismissing it. The new schema must accommodate the old evidence and perhaps re-interpret it, as well as admit the new. Now this illustrates how the timing of the find is crucial: too early and the evidence is likely to be dismissed, too late and events have moved on. At the right time, discovered evidence can both construct the discussion and determine its outcome. It is for this reason I have deferred the publication of this last blog until after my predicted demise. Should events deny me my death, I still have an opportunity to suppress this evidence. To publish now would risk forcing the issue, which would be unwise. Things are still unclear. The present is still revealing itself.

When it comes to my name and its enduring association with the Australia work at Watulapitiyalu, I must set at least this record straight. The real credit should accrue to Gina Chupesi. She initiated the study, provided its framework, created the theoretical model which

we together later demonstrated to be correct and organized most of the work. My ownership of the findings arose out of my pre-existing superior academic status, in particular my title, my achievements thus accruing by rank rather than by merit. I do not claim culpability, but I do accept responsibility.

Now merit is also an interesting, if also possibly an illusory concept in this context, since my entire involvement in the work of Dr. Chupesi came about as an entirely short-term exploitation of advantage, when, after an evening in the bar after a conference in Singapore, the two of us finished in bed together, excavating the depths of our shared desire to dig. The discoveries were significant and long lasting, and our relationship endured until her untimely death in that wholly avoidable accident. Roads in Northern Territories are usually not full of traffic. At night, an oncoming road train is often visible for miles before it arrives. The road is straight and good quality, so the head-on collision was put down to driver's drowsiness. It was perhaps a coincidence that just four hours beforehand, she had asked me yet again to divorce my wife, her desire for official status to be added to our relationship again overcoming the pragmatism that had, for over a decade, kept it alive. Of course, I had told her, I could never divorce my wife. "It could kill her," I said. The record, at least potentially, can now be straightened. It has only taken me twenty years…

Where I deserved recognition, and where I will nevertheless forever be seen as just an also-ran,

is on Sawu. It has taken over ten years of detailed and intense work to assemble evidence that can thus far be described, at best, as minimal and merely circumstantial in reality. Paradoxically, in this case, it was my possession of status relative to my colleague, the indomitable Dr. Sarnu, that was always going to relegate my contribution to the references. A star student, an achiever, an ambitious rich boy intent on proving his significance, Dr. Onggo Sarnu was also once a friend, the protégé who became an equal and then a torturer. For the larger part of our years working together, we cooperated, shared decisions, jointly owned outcomes. And then, in a divergence that in retrospect might appear sudden, we adopted different, conflicting and irreconcilable standpoints based on the same evidence. Neither of us was willing even to consider the other's point of view. For me, Sarnu has become a self-seeking, self-promoting, power-hungry liar. It could be that his position was always being dictated by those who hold influence over him, by powerful interests merely intent on asserting national and cultural control over identity-conferring history in the making. In the end, it's all about ownership. Gone are the days, and rightly so, that colonial adventurers qualified only by their parochial ignorance could attach their names to places and ideas that had been known to indigenous culture for centuries. Thompson's Falls in Kenya, Low's Gully on Mount Kinabalu, Macquarie River in New South Wales, not to mention the thousands of others, are mere appropriation by the unworthy of other people's

collective identity. Good riddance to that horrible presumption of power-blinded white supremacy, but personally I cannot welcome the narrow-minded walled-in nationalism that has replaced it.

But on Sawu, my achievement is being denied me by the contemporary reaction to arrogant colonialism, that demands a foreigner in a former colonial possession cannot even be acknowledged as being involved and must be written out of the story. It is inverted discrimination which, like inverted snobbery, is every bit as vicious as the original. I cannot recognise Homo sarnuensis as a new species, in the same way that he cannot accept my postulate of a regional presence for florensis. Does it matter? Perhaps not. Perhaps it never mattered that the laws of thermodynamics were correct. Ask an engineer.

This conflict, this war that has been waged between us is not merely personal. There are surely bigger actors involved. Sarnu's family business is a sponsor of my emeritus employer. They have become one of the tails that wags the dog, which is currently involved in biting off my daughter's career. Gemma has been identified for censure in the past and her field is always populated by the conveniently expendable. For her part, Elsie is organizing the whole of London, it seems, to oppose the company's and therefore the university's plans. Who is to say that her campaign has had no impact on her mother's status? And just how much of Sarnu's insistence on claiming his pitch in posterity is personal? How much of it might be an official position, a policy of not wanting a foreigner to claim

ownership of something now perceived as a national asset, or a method of promoting a fragile national identity or political position? How much might it be the Sarnu family identifying another, albeit minor, path to corporate promotion? And, if all or any of these were true, why did it become so personal? What drove a former student, someone I have known for over twenty-five years to try to break my skull? And, in the spirit of confession, which I have never officially attended, why do I so vehemently oppose? Am I being true to science, rationality, the persuasion of evidence, or am I pursuing the short term, the advantage to myself that will deny victory to my male competitor, like a stag clashing with another's antlers to no avail? Why, in the end, does everything relegate to the personal, the individual? Ask Hamlet…

Over the years my blog has been a personal record. It has never tried to approach the official or the scientific, but it has always claimed rationality and judgment, albeit via a lens of reflection, not analysis. There have rarely been times when this light has been totally internally reflected, but one has now arrived. Indeed, I can feel the spotlight isolating me from within. The fact that this entry will probably never be published allows me freedom to relate the detail.

The events in question are confined to the history of last week, but now demand they be relived. It was just a fortnight after my diagnosis. I was released from my legal quarantine and I was intent on activity, but I could already sense the tiredness intensifying. I was starting for the

first time in my life to lie in, to feel unable to wake. Gemma brought me my mug of tea. The slightest clatter onto the bedside table opened my eyes. She apologized. I said not to worry, that I couldn't drink the tea if I was still asleep. She told me not to worry and reminded me that, breaking the imposed habit of weeks, she was going into college that day. She had asked me if I wanted to come, to say hello to old friends, to catch up. The night before I had suggested such a visit, convincing myself I was merely keen to show my face, but perhaps also imagining the little immediate victories that could be claimed in person. But by the morning, when the click of pot on wood woke me, she knew I would not stir. Will you come? she asked. I must have answered, though I don't remember speaking. I was too tired. It was eight o'clock, she said, and confirmed that she was about to leave, that Geoff had already gone and that Elsie, poor, downtrodden, now redundant Elsie, was still in bed. "Just let her be," Gemma said. "I'll be back around four." And then I slept.

I know that I slept for almost exactly an hour. When I woke, after subconsciously recording the slam of the door below and then reimagining its sound as dreamed, I was facing my watch, habitually propped on its strap so it's dial - can a digital display be said to be a dial? - behaved like a miniature bedside clock. It displayed 08:44. The tea was tepid. I reached and drank. I felt suddenly better, ready to wake, recalling the numerous times I had found myself persuading

disbelieving others of tea's ability to deliver a caffeine shot. It was then that I heard the voices.

Backstreet London can be as quiet as anywhere. Street parking keeps traffic slow. There are a few motorbikes, especially when compared to the constant cacophony of two-stroke Yogya, fewer pedestrians, fewer still who converse. And the street, after all, is three floors down. Aircraft rarely intrude here, the low drone barely louder than a distant kettle, and, in times when viruses travel, people do not, so the skies, that quiet morning, were anyway empty.

Two familiar voices muffled through the bare, stained floorboards, the draughty gaps between also admitting sound. The number two and the familiarity are crucial. Elsie's room was below mine. It had not moved, at least in the three weeks since I had begun my now permanent residence. I had heard the heavy, panelled door close many times, its squeaking ceramic handle announcing entry or departure. I had heard the cupboard doors open and close, drawers slide and chairs move, but though my granddaughter's touch could never be described as subtle, it was never heavy. She used headphones to access her beloved media, and used her phone sotto voce, too quietly for me ever to catch the detail I regularly found myself trying to eavesdrop. But here, this morning, there were voices. There was also noise.

An anatomist friend once introduced me to an experience I would never have independently sought, but which I have never forgotten. The academic in question was also a specialist in

anatomical archaeology and we had attended a conference in Nairobi. The subject had been recent finds in Kenya and Tanzania, Olduvai, Turkana, and the rest. For some weeks we had been in contact because we had prepared and then presented a joint paper on what might constitute definitive evidence on the identification of species-defining differences in bone fragments originating in the human foot. She had suggested a side trip, to somewhere where speciation was quite specific, if that's not a tautology. It all depends on which specific vowel gets stressed… And so, we had a wonderful few days on Fregate in the Seychelles, where we encountered the blue pigeon, the incomparably rare Seychelles magpie robin and the fly-clouded olfactory experience of the giant tortoise.

It was when we were walking across this utterly quiet, car-less, engine-less diminutive island, that we had heard what sounded like tree felling in process. The tropical forest so close to the sea is not thick – we call it kerangas in Bahasa – but it was thick enough in places to deny more than twenty metres of clear sight. The noise grew, literally in our estimation describing an axe determinedly attacking a substantial trunk. And then the clearing opened, and we were presented with the spectacle of a pair of giant tortoises coupling at its centre, shells banging like car crashes. Our disturbance resulted in coitus interruptus, as the male slid to the side with a rasp, grunted and immediately started to feed. The newly disinterested female made her way to the edge of the space, paused by

the first tree and gently sank down into mud and peed.

I mentioned the noise. My companion reminded me that humans make noise too. We were both silent for a moment, our eyes on each other, reminding ourselves that the island's only hotel boasted bamboo-stilted rooms whose walls were acoustically transparent palm fronds. Here, in Islington, on this particular morning, the plaster, lath and the floorboards that separated my hearing from the coupling below provided no acoustic insulation. Tortoises, unlike people, do not have memorable voices.

My thoughts were immediately thrust back a day, recalling a conversation that had stayed so firmly etched in my mind that I doubt it will ever fade, the 'never' for me being about a month, or perhaps less… We had eaten. It was one of those now rare events, the family meal, where all the occupants of the house had gathered to share. To share food might be a necessary qualification, but for such sharing to be familial, it implies the sharing of everything. It's a mark of the age that, despite having a kitchen equipped to the rafters, boasting enough workspace, even not counting its recently installed island, to display apparently the entire stock of a Camden Lock antiques market, the meal was a take-away, or should I say a brought-in, a telephoned order to the Jaweli Tandoori around the corner on Holloway Road and delivered by a helmeted young woman dressed in shorts, a high vis vest, and Doc Martens on a bike. I'm told that when it rains, she comes in a van.

It was a memorable experience, chicken jalfrezi, chana aloo, sag paneer, brinjal bhaji, vegetable biryani, nan and raita. Over the years, I seem to have developed a photographic memory when it comes to eating. It was all a bit too bland for me, I announced, making reference to Indonesian food, which tends to be spicier than British-Indian, and Elsie, forever the one to please immediate need, had retrieved a more than mature half full jar of lime pickle from deep within a cupboard to satisfy my craving for spice. I accepted, noting that it still was not Indonesian sambal belacan. Gemma had expressed disbelief, saying that her daughter cooked so little she was surprised she knew where anything was in the kitchen. Elsie announced, to her mother's clear astonishment, that she knew where everything was in this house. It was the little wink she gave in my direction that caught the attention. What was she saying? And to whom was it being addressed? Apparently, none of us knew. But the food diverted our attention. We ate. We enjoyed. We conversed. We were family, with our dietary preferences apparently taken away by a take-away.

A family meal. Except for Geoff, of course. Grandad, Mum, Elsie, all in a line of onlys, only son, only daughter, only daughter. Whose son was Geoff? Exactly who was this outsider, this invitee to the household, this bed partner for my daughter, this part-time brought-in order, this temporary resident, this largely silent presence who seemed to harbour opinion but never express it?

Geoff Sullivan was his name, he had told me, soon after my arrival, so presumably his father was also a Sullivan. He had told me before, of course, since I had already met him, albeit always in passing on my previous visits. But we had never spent what might be described as 'time' together, since he is a relatively recent addition to my daughter's not extensive trophy cabinet. It was John Harness, of course, who was always the devoted husband, until he definitely lost both aspects of that label, when a fling with a younger woman destroyed the devoted and a hurried divorce cut the husband. There was another bloke, another academic, a philosopher if I remember, who did not last long. They never do. And then there was Geoff, the long-term benefits clerk, with his South London pedigree, conveniently far enough away not to impinge, neither to be locatable nor traceable. I had taken the trouble to ask Gemma if she had ever met any of his family. "No," she answered. How about an old flame? "No," she answered. A colleague? "He never brings his work home," she said. "Boring." Again, I find myself intrigued by the distance this Geoff created, as if the resulting void were a shield.

I had been feeling better a couple of days before that shared meal. I had announced at six thirty in the morning that I wanted breakfast out, partly because I was feeling more than a little enclosed. My misnamed ten-day quarantine had just ended and I needed to get out of the house, away from the confines of that potential coffin and partly because I wanted perhaps for the last

time to renew my acquaintance with Islington, the place I had got to know so well over the years, the place, if any such place might exist, that I called ‘home’.

I walked. Highbury Corner, down the gentle slope of New North Road to Essex Road and beyond as far as Coleman Fields. Then back up the streets via Packington to re-join Essex, where, down an adjoining alleyway that would pass by a mere passer-by, there is a café, pronounce ‘caff’, of course, that does the kind of food that once characterized working-class life in what was once a working-class area, the kind of food that now contributes to the embarrassment, depressed property prices and bad name of a postcode, though probably not in London N1. Liver and onions. Steak and kidney pie. Pie and mash with or without liquor. Steak and kidney pud! And, importantly for someone hailing from a household that breakfasts on coffee, fruit juice, quinoa, muesli, sun-dried tomato Mediterranean bread in a plastic wrapper, and more coffee, the caff offers a full English breakfast, complete with meatless sausage, fatty bacon and two eggs, a vision on that morning that took on the character of a revelation from heaven. I can hold on the baked beans, but tinned tomatoes are a treat that soddens the toasted white sliced.

The place was vibrant, filled with the chatter of still-spaced people, eager to renew their acquaintance with life after the forced closures and confinements of recent months. I had eaten. I had just taken a top up to my tea, the vast stainless-steel teapot having been clattered open,

an extra bag tossed in, hissing steam pressured into its cavernous space, its hinged lid noisily closed, and the entire volume bodily shaken for a few seconds to mix the old with the new to retain the quality. It was then I saw Geoff Sullivan, ten minutes' walk away from that kitchen I had left over an hour earlier, heading down Upper Street towards the Angel.

Instinctively, no doubt bloody-mindedly, I left the tea, paid up and followed, frantically trying to keep up. Ostensibly he was on his way to work, I suppose. Somewhere near the Angel, had been the answer to my query of where exactly does he work? He would leave the house always at seven forty-five and always walked. To where, specifically, neither Gemma nor Elsie knew, nor, it had occurred to me, was he willing to say. But this was well past ten o'clock, long after the occupant of a desk job ought to have become rooted to his furniture.

I followed. It was a large building near the Angel, the kind that boasts presence, but shuns identity, the kind where there are no grand corporate signs, only an admixture in matrix array of labels, each visiting card size, bearing collections of names that read like a randomised phone book. He went in. Five minutes later, while I was still loitering over the road, wondering what I might do with my embarrassingly devious mind, which seemed to seek out opportunities to distrust people, he reappeared, crossed the road and went into the tube station. He did not reappear. In a feat of true intellectual deduction, I concluded he may have taken a train. Perhaps

an appointment out of the office, perhaps a meeting… A devious mind decided to check.

I crossed the road and entered the building via its permanently rotating glass doors, which I gently pushed. They immediately stopped, causing a young man in the opposite segment of circle to shout, “Just let it hang, mate! Cool. It stops if you touch it. Just let it happen.” I was still trying to translate his message when the door abruptly restarted and resumed its independent, stately rotation. Inside there was an over-lit void. A large metal contraption probably called an artwork occupied the atrium’s upper volume, while an altar-like reception desk left only a narrow alley via which the building’s guts might be accessed. There was a doorman, probably referred to as a security guard, or rather ‘officer’, seated priest-like behind. I approached.

I asked for Geoff Sullivan by name. The doorman was in a bright uniform which bore the type of over-stated, over-coloured, logo one might expect to advertise a contracted private security firm, one that probably employed exclusively on zero hours. It resembled a costume that might have been better suited to the private army of a James Bond film villain. I`ve come to see Geoff Sullivan, I announced. I was of course immediately bombarded with the Covid rules. I wasn`t wearing a mask. I hadn’t sanitized my hands. Appointments are prearranged via the website or app only, mate. I need to see Geoff Sullivan, I said. Who? The man who came in ten minutes ago and left five minutes later, I said somewhat over-specifically. No chance, mate,

came the reply. Appointments only. I don't know his name, anyway. But he's never here. His office is upstairs, but he uses it just for mail. Comes and collects and then disappears. We hardly see him. Do you want to leave a note? No, I said, it's not urgent, which, of course, it now was. Benefits clerk? With an office in the building that was clearly not municipal? Privatized services? Contracted out? There were many possible explanations, but the only one that made sense was opacity.

Twelve hours later, we happened to be watching television together back at Gem's house. Unusually in a household without a content contract, and thanks to the Covid virus, there was football on the television, not that the experience excited sufficiently to generate much comment. The blokes were still being blokey, the uneventful match eventually giving way to talk smaller than usual.

You're from the south, I had asked, the 'London' being both implied and understood. Yeah, West Hill, Wandsworth. I nodded, indicating I knew the generality. I was, of course, lying, silently. You would have gone to Elliott, no doubt, or perhaps Southfields. Sure did. Elliott. Mid-nineties? He nodded. There was a near miss on the box. We both commented that if basketball players regularly missed the target, they would be dropped. Geoff appeared to want to be sociable. He seemed relaxed, defences momentarily down.

You will remember my wife, I said. She used to teach there. Elliot? Yes. He paused for a just a

second or two, just a tad longer than he had previously anticipated would be necessary. Mrs. Pitcairn… I don't remember being taught by her, though I do remember the name. Geography, I said. Didn't do much geography then, he said. She was a small woman with long grey hair, swept back in a bun? It was all his personal, freely offered memory. Yes, that's her. Her hair wasn't always grey, of course, and the bun came later on, the style she adopted having declared herself an old woman. We used to joke about it. Mrs. Pitcairn… Ah, yes. She was very quiet. She never taught me, but I do remember the name.

My wife, Penny, was a devoted teacher for many years. She had worked in several London schools, having risen to the status of an advisory teacher at the height of her career. Her subject area was Special Needs, Learning Support, as it became, my invention of geography being the bait that was swallowed. By the later nineties, she was already ill, already having been forced to give up her full-time position because of the pressures of illness and its treatments. The step back was advised, and a step back she took, opting to do peripatetic special-needs tuition to small groups of students, largely part-time, largely without contract, largely on supply. She did work in Elliott school, and so would probably have never encountered a mainstream pupil such as Geoff Sullivan. But the complication for Geoff arises from two little details his briefing had not anticipated. The small woman with the grey hair in a bun was a perfectly accurate description of my wife. It accurately describes a specific picture

of her I had published on my website, a picture that has been public property via the Internet since I nostalgically put a personal site together and published it when I started the Sawu work. It was a special photo, that specific picture, taken on a wedding anniversary just a few months before she died. It was like a final memory of her real self before the cancer would effect its terminal devastation of her body. I chose it for that reason, to give it special memory status. I didn't have many photos of her from that period, because she became reluctant to pose and so it was that this unrepresentative representation, taken on that special day, so special that the hair, which normally hung loose to her shoulders, was tied up in a bun in deference to the near formality of the occasion, so it was that this image appeared on my site. God knows why, because for our anniversary dinner we were only going to the Sultan's Armpit up Essex Road.

Penny and I were from that generation before mobile phones existed, and we only carried a camera when we travelled. In our youth, photography was expensive, at least the developing and printing of photographs was expensive. We took few photographs. And when we did take them, their prime function was to record experience, not to advertise ourselves. There are in existence only a handful of photographs that have survived the years of travel and hard work. The grey-haired bun of our wedding anniversary was the pick of the bunch. All the others, had anyone had access to them except me, showed Penny with her long hair

down, shoulder length, originally black, later increasingly grey, streaked at first and then all consuming.

The other complication that Geoff Sullivan could not have anticipated, the other bait he swallowed whole, was that Penny Pitcairn qualified as a teacher before we were married. She was after all two years older than me, a fact that often had me call her a ‘cradle snatcher’, a term that used to render her playfully argumentative. Her maiden name was Stead and she never changed it, at least professionally. Throughout her career she was Stead, first Miss and later Ms. She was never Mrs, a title she despised, though representing an institution she persistently worshiped. At least in school she was never Mrs. Pitcairn, always Miss or Ms. Stead.

So, Geoff Sullivan was not a benefits clerk. And he was not a student in Elliot school. And his claimed recollection of my wife was merely a regurgitation of the publicly available, certainly not born of any personal experience. And that particular morning, given the loud humping and shouts percolating through the ceiling and floorboards from the room below, he was no longer the chosen partner of my daughter, Gemma, but the bedmate of Elsie, my precious, beautiful, promiscuous and now devious granddaughter.

Over that take-away carry-out brought-in meal from the Jaweli on Holloway Road, extra spiced by the lime pickle Elsie had just located, I decided to play the advocate of a devil, though which one I am not sure.

There’s nothing like a bit of extra spice in life, I said to Elsie, with a wink. She smiled. She always does, partly to show off those perfect teeth. How was Hackney Metro today, Gem? I asked. She shrugged. I wish I could say ‘same’, she said, but it’s not. It’s full of teachers frantically preparing materials, frankly, doing more prep than they have done in years, and confused administrators imitating headless chickens, carrying letters of complaint under their wings. There’s a concerted campaign amongst the students to ask for a reduction in their fees because they are not being taught. Did anyone ask after me? I asked. No, said Gemma. Didn’t you go into college as well? asked Elsie. Edward was too tired this morning, darling, said Gemma. I decided to let him sleep. Do you have any more of those fresh green chillies you put in my soup, Gem? I asked. I fancy a bit more spice in my life, I said, tittering, and offering another wink towards Geoff Sullivan, who partially choked on a chickpea.

Short term rules… Or does it? Perhaps I am part of a longer game.

Edward Pitcairn on the telephone

Call connected from number withheld at 10:07, data can be supplied on request.

Automated message: thank you for calling the department of work and pensions. For training purposes, this call may be recorded. Please have on hand your personal details and documents relating to your claim, if you have one. We advise that you should have your social security number, full name and address, bank details and reference numbers from communications relating to your current claims under universal benefit.

I will give you a list of options. Please choose the option most relevant to your call by pressing the relevant number on your telephone's keypad. Press one for queries about existing claims. Press two if you are a customer making a new claim. Press three for general enquiries. Press four if your query is related to accessibility, disability or mobility issues. Press star for anything else.

2

Thank you for contacting the department of work and pensions. For training purposes, this call may be recorded. Please select from the following options. Press one if your new claim relates to jobseeker's allowance. Press two if it relates to any other benefit.

1

Thank you for contacting the department of work and pensions. For training purposes your call may be recorded. Press one if you have

already submitted the details of your new claim. Press two if this is a wholly new claim.

2

About 10 minutes of music playing on a loop. Edward Pitcairn was recorded as mumbling, “Why do they record this stuff through wet biscuits in a bathroom?” He almost hung up several times, but he reminded himself out loud each time that he had to see it through. There was a telling click of a connection, followed by a short ring tone.

Hello my name is Mike. Can I start by taking your name?

Pitcairn. Edward Pitcairn.

Thank you. And your social security number?

I don’t have that… I am… I’m calling on behalf of someone else. It’s my granddaughter…

Mr. Pitcairn, I’m sorry…

It’s professor, actually. Professor Pitcairn.

Sorry, Professor Pitcairn, I am not allowed to deal with representatives when registering a new claim. If your granddaughter is unable to make the claim for herself, please choose the accessibility option from the main menu. They will take your granddaughter’s details and if she has a mobility issue or a learning issue, you will be able to register as a representative. Alternatively, your granddaughter can contact us directly, either to make a claim or register you as a representative. Is your granddaughter there now? Could I possibly speak to her?

No. I mean yes. No. She’s here, but she doesn’t know I’m making this call on her behalf. She is, how can I put it, resistant to the idea.

To what idea, sir?

To the idea of claiming benefits.

If your granddaughter does not want to make a claim, I think it is her business, Sir. I think you or her would be better talking to general enquiries, Professor Pitcairn. I am…

Look, sorry, Mike, wasn't it? Mike, I am sure that if I get the right person, I will be able to…

Please contact general enquiries or you can go to our website at www.claims.gov.uk for explanatory notes and details of how to apply. You can even download the necessary forms, fill them in and send them by surface mail, if you wish. Can I help you with anything else this morning?

I will try again.

You have a good day, sir.

Call connected from number withheld, 10:42, data can be supplied on request.

Automated message: thank you for calling the department of work and pensions. For training purposes, this call may be recorded. Please have on hand your personal details and documents relating to your claim, if you have one. We advise that you should have your social security number, full name and address, bank details and reference numbers from communications relating to your current claims under universal benefit.

I will give you a list of options. Please choose the option most relevant to your call by pressing the relevant number on your telephone's keypad. Press one for queries about existing claims. Press two if you are a customer making a new claim. Press three for general enquiries. Press four if

your query is related to accessibility, disability or mobility issues. Press star for anything else.

3

Welcome to the general enquiries menu. Press one for enquiries about universal credit. Press two for enquiries about a payment or payments. Press three if your enquiry is of a general nature and not related to a claim.

3

Approximately 15 minutes of looped music. “More fucking biscuits and bathrooms…”

Good morning, Shakira speaking. May I know who is calling please?

Pitcairn, Edward Pitcairn. I am writing on behalf… I mean calling, calling on behalf…

And how can I help you this morning Mr. Pitkin?

Professor. Professor Pitcairn, not Pitkin…

Thank you, Mr. Pitcairn. Professor Pitcairn, how can I help you this morning?

I’m calling on behalf of my granddaughter…

I’m sorry, Professor Pitcairn, I am not authorized to discuss cases or personal information with third parties…

I’m not a third party. I’m her grandfather.

Just to be clear… I am not authorized to discuss cases or personal information with third parties, unless that third party is the official representative of the applicant. Can I ask you to speak to the mobility and accessibility people first?

Can I ask a question?

Of course, sir.

Am I actually speaking to the benefit office for Islington?

Your call is being handled by a central call handling facility, Sir. I and my colleagues can handle general enquiries about benefits. If your enquiry relates to someone resident in Islington, then I can handle that query for you. Where I work does not affect my ability to handle your query.

I was hoping to speak to someone in the Islington office.

I think you will find that all general enquiries can and will be directed to the centralised call handling system, Sir. If you want to contact a specific office, then please obtain the number from their own contact page or from the list of contacts on your local authority's website.

I want to speak to a particular officer…

That would not be a normal procedure for a general enquiry, Sir.

I was rather hoping that…

Excuse me, Sir. Is the person you want to contact handling an existing claim for you? If so, then please just give me the reference number and I will be able to check its status.

No, there is no existing claim. In fact, there is no claim at all at the moment. I wanted to speak to a particular benefits clerk…

That is not normal practice, Sir. Is the matter of a personal nature?

No. Well, yes. It's to do with my granddaughter. She's lost her job.

Can you please redial and contact the new claims area of jobseeker's allowance, Sir?

Look, I am trying to contact a clerk called Sullivan, Geoff Sullivan…

Do you know which office he works in?

No. I assume it's Islington.

Is he a friend of yours?

Yes, I suppose he is.

Is the matter personal or of an emergency nature?

Emergency nature, nature emergency…

Sorry?

Just thinking out loud… It's not really personal. It's about my granddaughter. She's lost her job.

As I said earlier, Sir. Please contact the new claims area of jobseeker's allowance…

Yes, I know. I just need to speak to Geoff Sullivan.

This does sound like a situation that would be better addressed locally, Sir. Can I suggest you contact your local council and enquire there? If the person you are looking for works for the local council, they will know how to contact him. If this is a personal matter, then I can say for definite that you would be better ringing your friend direct on his private number. Will that be all?

I suppose it is.

Have a good day, Sir.

Incoming call, 11:27 AM, number withheld, details on application.

Welcome to Islington! We hope to serve the community, inclusively, without discrimination of any form. Islington Council is an inclusive employer, committed to policies of equality and inclusivity regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or religious affiliation. We promote

fair employment practices, offer our employees at least a living wage and reject all forms of workplace discrimination.

You have contacted the number for general enquiries. Please note that your call may be recorded for training purposes. If your enquiry is about housing, press one. If it is related to health, press two. If it is related to family credit, press three. If it relates to education, press four. If it relates to arts and culture, press five. If it relates to the environment, water supply or waste disposal, press six. For transport issues, press seven. For mobility or accessibility issues, press eight or anything else, press star.

*

Approximately 41 minutes of recorded music. “Wet towels being stretched around crushed violins…”

Good morning, thank you for holding. You’re through to Wendy. Can I take your name please?

Pitcairn. Edward Pitcairn.

Good morning, Mr. Pitkin. How can I help you today?

It’s professor. Professor Pitcairn. Professor Edward Pitcairn. Pitcairn, not Pitkin.

How can I help?

I am ringing on behalf of my granddaughter who has just lost her job…

I’m sorry, sir, but we don’t handle enquiries about jobseeker’s allowance on this number. This is a general enquiries number.

Sorry… Sorry… It is about my granddaughter, but I am also trying to contact a particular clerk

who works for the council. He's called Geoff Sullivan. He's a benefits clerk.

I'm sorry, sir. It's not our policy to connect general enquiries to particular employees. In any case, I have no access to employee data. I could not tell you even if I wanted who works for the council or who does not work for the council. Is the query personal?

No, not really… Well, it is, I suppose.

Can I suggest you contact the person direct, using a personal number?

I have left a message on his phone, but I wanted to contact him at work. That's why I'm ringing the council. He works for the council as a benefits clerk.

I must point out, sir, that some of the general administration of benefit claims may be handled by staff from contracted-out agencies.

But how could I find out who he worked for?

Is he your friend?

Yes…

Could I suggest you just ask him?

I suppose you could suggest it. I doubt he'd answer.

Professor Pitkin, I think I can't answer your query.

I'm sorry. Pitcairn. Edward Pitcairn. Sorry to have wasted your time.

Edward Pitcairn’s blog

It is now over five weeks since that diagnosis and I am still here, here to write another entry in that blog I promised I would never start. The last was supposed to be the last… Of course it was, or wasn’t, was it? Why would you talk to yourself when there are other people? At least that’s what I used to say to myself. But that was before I began referring to myself in a past tense that is easier to write than speak. It always seems easier to put words on paper than breathe them, especially now.

The tiredness is taking over. It’s not predictable, that is what is so frustrating. I can feel as fit as a fiddle and start doing something, but a few minutes later I have not even the energy to stand. Once it hits, it takes a long time to subside and only if I condescend to sleep. And it is tiredness of a kind I have not known before now. It’s not just a lack of energy, but more like a lack of will. If only I could persuade my body to move, my brain tells me, everything would be fine. But then, when I persuade my mind to do the talking, nothing, it seems, wants to move when the message is sent. I can consciously tell a limb to move, but it only sometimes listens. And, when it’s deaf, its dead weight is appropriately adjectivally qualified. I presume when the end comes, my mind will simply not understand what is being done to it. It will protest, but to no avail because I will not know whom to address, except myself, who won’t be listening. By the time I perceive the reality, reality will already have

taken over. Only surprise will be left. It will come as a surprise that will never be felt, let alone interpreted. By the time I will have asked the question, there will be no time left to answer it. I suppose.

I seem to have changed profession. The archaeologist in me now seems fossilized, animation suspended to permanent static posterity, achievements being etched in granite like some organically developing tombstone as yet not uncovered. I wonder if anyone sees their own gravestone? What must life have been like for those ancient kings whose death monuments were being constructed throughout their lives? Goodness knows I've visited enough of them, from pyramids to barrows, from a Michelangelo chapel to a Bernini tomb, from Ming mineshafts to Tang pits. Fancy a visit to your own inanimate future? And what would they have said when they were told the work was finished? Goodbye? Bon voyage.

Anyway, I'm going for the furnace. I don't want anyone in a thousand years coming to dig me up, reassemble me and invent some flight of fancy about how I might have lived, how I might have survived both Covid and climate change, only to succumb to some natural demise. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, no mention of putrescence there. Product, not process. Ashes are the input, not the output. A flaming fire for me. Actually, it's probably just an electric arc furnace. An industrial age…

But when? Next week? The week after? It's not as if this is news. Since the day I saw my first

dead fly, I have known that I was going to die. There is a hundred per cent chance that life will end in death, the only question is when. Though I know the process is nearing its end, I still have no real idea about the when. So much for knowledge. When certainty arrives, it merely confirms its lack of focus. I know we live in a probabilistic universe, and I appreciate that the probability of my death is one, pure certainty. But we do have to ask the right question. Whether is not at issue. The real question is when. At any particular moment, we have an expected probability of being harvested that is easy to compute. Just divide the current deaths per day by the total number of beings on the planet, and you have it. Much good it does you. At each instant, however, the experienced probability of dying is zero, otherwise you wouldn't be around to calculate it! It was Gemma who, after reading my prognosis, said a week, and then another and then another… How right she was. If I might continue to apply Zeno's technique, I might just go on for ever. But I hear my mathematician colleagues remind me that the series that is Zeno's Paradox sums to infinity, and an infinity that is quite close by… I suppose the end product is an infinitely stretched time, the tortoise stuck to the spot with Achilles frozen in the process of not quite ever overtaking. Personally, I never wanted to be either the tortoise or Achilles, but the image does resemble what happens to light, at least in theory, on the boundary of a black hole. I suppose that's just another name for the eventual condition we approach, a timeless stasis.

But I never anticipated becoming a detective, an amateur sleuth to mimic one of those unbearably haughty dames like Miss Marple, who blunder through everyone else's wisdom with a vision driven by their own ignorance, punctuated only by their feigned surprise at their always unexpected achievements. And they do succeed, always succeed in appealing, if predictable ways. Whereas I will only mark time, probably, until it stops, and then, no doubt, with me out of the way and unable to defend myself, my legacy will be systematically dismantled by those who have always tended to agree with me thus far. It amazes me how soon respect is evaporated by absence.

I have spent so much time in my unproductive imaginings… I have also taken to riding on buses. No one else wants to, it seems. Well, just at this moment anyway. Everyone is afraid of becoming infected. Everyone has to wear a mask. Everyone has to be socially distanced. In Britain, it seems, there are very few people called everyone, because the buses I have used were close to empty and generally the only person in a mask was me. I have spent the last three days on buses. And I have no symptoms, so I must be all right.

So, it's buses to the rescue! A 29 takes me to Trafalgar Square. You would have thought an archaeologist would want the museum, but for me it is the gallery I crave. One is British the other National, the museum and the gallery, that is. It has never failed to interest me why the world of objects in history is British, but the

world of painting and art is National. I have no energy to tramp the rooms, obviously, so I select one, get there somehow and sit. The seat in the middle allows me to face different walls every few minutes, and focus on one painting, until some punter obscures it, and then I move my gaze. Each time I socially distance, hand cleanse, offer my name and landline - I don't have a UK mobile anymore - so I can't be tracked and traced, only called from the computerised contact list I append at the entrance. I could give the number of Gem's second phone, her 'old one' that she insists I carry around with me, 'just in case', though in case of what I don't know. I might, after all, drop dead, and then I wouldn't be able to call her anyway, would I, darling? But at the gallery, what would be the point of registering the number of a phone that wasn't even mine? If a ping came through, it would be Gem who would be identified with it, not me. Perhaps that would be a good wheeze in a pandemic, for everyone to use someone else's phone and then go risky. Get them infected! Or at least socially infected, because the virus would be with someone else!

I used to have a UK mobile, but it didn't ever seem to want to work in the middle of the Sava Sea, and when it did, it charged me a fortune because I was roaming. I tried to tell it that, in fact, I was standing still, but it still cost the same. Ditched. Useless. So, I got an Indonesian phone and a new contract. I was being bright, I thought, but on Sawu it still says I'm roaming, because I am too far from home, tough it doesn't specify whether the home is mine or the company's. And

this in spite of the fact that my colleague on the site is part-owner of the company! And, of course, it's useless in the UK, where I am again roaming, it tells me. The call from Heathrow to Gem cost the same as eating for a month. So here I am, proudly ditching all my phones. Don't need one. Except now, I seem to need one again. At least they still let me on the bus, though I think they shouldn't. They might catch cancer. The gallery let me in as well, just a name and a phone number, that same landline we have had in that house, save for a prefix change, since Penny and I moved in with the toddling Gem, the beautiful, sweet, curious Gemma. It's such a shame that school ruins children before life does.

And then, after my hour in the gallery, I can get that London institution, the number 11, which will show me the sights of Westminster and West London all the way to Fulham, and then the sights of the east when I get the same bus back to the end of the line at Liverpool Street. I succumb to the tube there, around the loop to Kings Cross then the Victoria line home. It's a trip that now shortens people's lives by virtue, if that be the term, of exposure to air pollution. If questioned, I might claim it doesn't apply to me, since I have more immediate, perhaps even shorter-term concerns.

I did something different a couple of days ago and it took me a day to recover. It was designed to be a follow up on the previous escapade, the one that finished at Angel tube pursuing an acquaintance as he descended into the darkness.

And then catching him out by virtue of a doorman's innocent revelations.

I decided to cut out the negotiation and went straight to the Angel by bus, expecting our friend to appear at that same building. Given that, according to the advertised clockwork of his life, he leaves the house at a quarter to eight, one would expect him to appear at that great junction fifteen minutes later, at the latest. That morning, he did not. He did not access that office 'just for mail collection' and neither did he take the Northern Line.

I waited until eight thirty and then rang home, using Gem's 'old one', selecting the entry HOME from the contact list. I must ask her why it's in capitals. I knew he was there the previous evening, because that had been one of Gem's 'man events', when Geoff Sullivan was in his masculine attendance, and so he would still be around the next morning, this morning. Gem was always keen on sex. She was barely sixteen when the boyfriend got chased out of the house by Penny at five in the afternoon, just after school when she came home unexpectedly, and found the two of them at it on the stairs. They had never even made it as far as the bedroom. Good on her. Life comes around just once. The trick is not to make any decisions! There was no answer from HOME.

But last night, being a 'man night' meant that this morning was a 'man morning' and Geoff Sullivan, if that name be anything to do with what other people call him, would have left the house at his habitual seven forty-five and, if habit were

any guide, he would have already tramped down Upper Street. Why did he never take the tube from Highbury? It makes no sense, because where could he go from Angel that he could not access from Kings Cross? I had assumed he would walk every morning as far as his mailing address, at least he would if there was any truth in his stories. But that morning he was nowhere to be seen.

I waited until ten. I was on the point of heading home, or perhaps back to that caff for a bacon sandwich, and then I thought, “Sod it!” Now “Sod it!” is a very good thing to think if you don’t know what you are doing. It has an air of the decision being made, the course being set. Like most states of surety, it’s close to delusion, but for me it worked this time.

I crossed Theobald’s Road to the opposite corner and took a few steps along St John Street to access the entrance to that large building into which he had disappeared last time, the one that has the ‘mailing address’.

“I’ve come to see Geoff Sullivan”, I said confidently to the security guard.

He looked at me rather strangely. It was the same fellow as last time, so possibly there was recognition at work. As fast as I could, I ran through his imagined responses to see if I might create a follow-up for each one. There might be several possible responses. “I’ll see if he’s in” might be one. “Who is calling?” or even “What name is it?” might have been others. But “We don’t have a Geoff Sullivan in the building” rather stumped me.

“I was here last week when he came into this building. I saw him leave. I asked you what he was doing, and you told me he comes here to pick up his mail.”

Recognition swept like a storm tide across the face. “Oh him. No idea what his name is. Just picks up mail.”

“But it’s his office…”

“I don’t think I said that, Sir. I am not authorized to divulge the names of the occupiers of our suites. A request like that has to be addressed to the management.” He moved to one side, partially blocking my further advance into the foyer, effectively showing me the door. I told him that I knew where it was. It always concerns me how complete loyalty can be bought for such a small salary.

In a flash of inspiration, I uttered my coup de grace. “So, you let people in here without checking their identity? Is that correct? The man comes through the door. He accesses an office and collects mail which he takes out of the building. He does all of that without the security guard even knowing his name…?” Clearly not true.

“Anyone with a pass gets in, Sir. No pass, no entry.”

“So, the man I am talking about has a pass?”

“I am not authorized to divulge information about the clients who rent space without their permission or authority from the management.”

“And precisely who is the management? How do I contact them?”

He answered the question that I wanted to ask, not the one I had spoken. “I cannot take messages, Sir. Please locate the building on the internet and communicate via the contact page.”

He took another small step to his left, further blocking any route past him.

“Now if you wouldn’t mind, Sir…”

This wholly English euphemism for, “Now do as you are told or else” always produces its desired effect of removing flies from hair. Leave, or be squashed. I left, thanking him, unsquashed for now. “If he calls again, please tell him that Professor Pitcairn called.”

It was a spur of the moment decision. “Sod it” again came into my head. What was the point of pussying around with subtlety? I should let Geoff Sullivan know I am on to him and see what he does. He can hardly threaten me with a shortening of my life. I’ll follow him next time, if I get another chance, though I don’t know if I can keep up with him.

I set off for home with the idea of reviewing a paper I had been preparing for months, but with each step I took its significance seemed to diminish as its memory blurred. I recalled going down to the kitchen to make a coffee before I left the house. I saw Elsie momentarily, up unnecessarily early now that work no longer pressed into her schedule. I recalled how, like an angler, I had cast little luring flies across the surface of our shared words, just possibly suggesting she might offer something about Geoff, given, of course, that he had just spent the night in her mother’s bed, but the bait remained

floating above her interests, ignored, unsavoured, perhaps rejected as unsavoury, enigmatic. She's a hard one.

I continued walking, albeit slowly. Things are changing. I feel less able to… to do anything, if truth be told. I am tired, but not tired like I should sleep. It's a lethargy, an inability, a general lack of energy. I can't concentrate. I can't work. I can't… I remember my father's words. "There's no such thing as can't…" he used to say whenever the little boy claimed lack of ability.

And that's about the sum total. I just can't. I think of things I should do, things I should consider, things I should follow up, but I can't bring myself to do them and, when I try, I get nowhere. I sit at my desk, I sit at my laptop, and the words that always used to come so easily, so easily, it has to be repeated, that the editing was always the greater task. But now the words just will not appear. It's almost as if they no longer have any significance. Artefacts from thirty thousand years ago have lain around for a while, and a while longer will not affect their message. For me, personally, a lack of time breeds an incessant impatience to do something, to get something done, but I can't seem to decide what. Definitively, I just can't…

At least the business is complete. The trusty old laptop that has been carted around the world several times has now given up its most important file, the one that had to be sent. 'Edward Pitcairn, business', it was called. It's taken me several days to put everything together. But now it's done. The bank accounts, insurance

policies, pensions, investments, all have been listed in one of those word processor tables where you can tab between the cells. Gem says she prefers a spreadsheet, but personally I can't see the difference. It's not as if we're going to calculate anything… Login details and passwords are included, plus the contact information needed to register my death. I have even included up-to-date balances, but I created the table over the last week, so they will already be out of date. I was surprised at how much I am still worth, given that everything is going to be amortized in… how many days, or weeks I still don't know. Well, at least it's done and emailed off to Gem. She can peruse it at her leisure, but if she has a question, of course, she shouldn't wait too long. It might not get answered. And, if one is posed, I'll get yet another chance to speak of myself in the past tense. At least 'tense' will be accurate.

It might be concluded, given the above, that I was pretty much inside my own head as I hobbled along the pavement, not really having any goal in mind, except an eventual arrival at home. So, having drawn the blank at The Angel, I was dawdling rather than making progress. I resolved to be strong and set off at increased pace, as fast as I could muster, trying to ignore the fatigue. But my body, today, was at best partially listening.

I had crossed Pentonville Road and walked as far as the end of Liverpool Road, which I crossed, and I was ambling north along the raised level on the western side of Upper Street, when, by virtue of my elevation, I caught sight of my original

quarry, Geoff Sullivan, walking south on the other side of the road, near the junction with Essex Road. It even took me a moment to recognise him, so completely had my thoughts been confined to myself. Why I might not have immediately placed him I have no idea, since he was in the only clothes I have ever seen him wearing, the same cracked leather jacket, the same checked shirt, the same faded jeans and the same scuffed trainers. It was the bag over the shoulder that really identified him at distance, black, cuboidal with a top zip running its full length, on a long strap, over large and always apparently hanging open.

I decided to give chase, but then reject the term, since, given my current state of fatigue, the word was probably inappropriate. I opted instead for ‘pursuit’. Luckily, Geoff Sullivan had not seen me, and, rather strangely, given that I had heard a self-description assessing himself as being a bit of a charger, he too was ambling along, pausing here and there to look in shop windows, clearly with no intention of buying even a window! I suppose his self-confession of being a ‘charger’ had been, that morning a week before, just a way of saying to me that he did not want me to walk with him to the station. No doubt, his destination had to be kept private.

I crossed the road and still had him in my sights. I was doing my utmost to catch up with him, but my energy was rather lacking. What seemed strange to me was his obvious dawdling. He was certainly going nowhere fast. In fact, he was displaying a tendency to stop at almost every

shop window to peer at the displays, almost feigning interest. It's not often that a forty-year-old man poses to peruse displays of greeting cards, toys, hardware, houses for sale, then a restaurant menu, more houses for sale, another menu and medical appliances, all aimed at people considerably less able than himself. I found, surprisingly, that I was catching up. Was he expecting me?

Soon, I was literally standing next to him, and I had not even rushed. Somehow, he had still not seen me. I was actually standing just a few feet from him. It seemed that we could have been almost touching shoulders and he would not have noticed, as he read the latest blurb on mortgage arrangements on offer from a national bank. A life-size, smiling black face displaying perfected teeth stared back at us from a reassuring suburban still life. The message was clear: no need to worry about money, because I'm here. I approached further and was literally a metre from him, but he still seemed much more interested in the shop fronts and, apart from regularly consulting the time on his mobile phone, which might have been glued to his left palm, he did not seem to be taking any notice of the world around him.

And then he took a call. He swiped his screen with his index finger and placed the phone close to his face. It was then, on the half-turn to bring the mobile up to his left ear, that he saw me and recognised that he had blundered. His expression so clearly said that he had seen a ghost that I actually did offer, "But I am not dead yet" under

my breath, words that registered with no one but me. He stopped dead for a split second and then recovered what was obviously professional composure. He still had to take the call. He was about to say a name but choked on it. “Hello…” came out, but the following word he silenced, clipped to a labial stumble. He acknowledged my presence with a little wave of his right hand, before turning away and taking a few brisk steps until he was out of aural range.

There was a short pause while, paradoxically, he walked towards the edge of the pavement, closer to the traffic. Now this particular section of Upper Street is near to that strange little alleyway that goes by the resplendent name of Islington High Street. Anyone wanting quiet, anyone worried about hearing a phone call, anyone seeking respite from the traffic noise, would have walked the twenty paces or so needed to access the quiet pedestrian area parallel to the main road, always tranquil and quiet, despite its ‘High Street’ label. Our friend, Geoff, however, did the act exact opposite.

The call did not last long, just a minute or so. Its termination was indicated by another swipe of his screen and a new determination of purpose seemed to infect his presence. Now I became his focus. He came back towards me. Now there was recognition, and a hint of a smile, an extended hand in greeting, a touch on my upper arm, a reassurance, but there was also impatience in his voice, also an air of the rehearsed, at least to my ear, a planned, even learned manner. I will try to record what was said before I forget.

“Edward… Fancy meeting…”

“I live just up the road.”

He smiled. There was some irony, but I had the distinct impression he was trying to think of what tack to take with me. There was a distinct lack of spontaneity in his voice, as if he needed to acknowledge my presence, but also a determination that I had to be got rid of. It was I who continued.

“I saw you a while ago. I was trying to catch up, but I’m pretty exhausted.” I inserted a long pause that denied honesty.

“I’m not surprised. You probably shouldn’t be walking. Did you walk all the way from the house?”

“I did.” I was, of course, lying.

“It’s a long way…”

“No, it isn’t. I’ve been down as far as The Angel. I was actually on my way home.” I left a pause, looked straight at him and generally staggered a little. Now I have never been an actor. At college, as a twenty-year-old, I was in the dramsoc and played bit parts in Tennessee Williams’s Camino Real, Miller’s The Crucible and I even had a go at Krapp’s Last Tape, which is hardly a bit part. I had to learn how to survive by improvisation on the spot during the first evening of the two-day run because the real to reel Grundig kept chewing up my tape, which was, absurdly, not scripted. This little stagger was nothing better than ham, but at least it was pure ham, and if there is one thing a dying man can do convincingly, even if he does not try, is ham.

He stepped forward to steady me with soft hands offered to my upper arms. Had I actually collapsed, I would have fallen straight through his lack of grasp.

“Steady, steady, Edward. Are you feeling all right?”

It’s a stupid question at the best of times. but making that bland enquiry to a man with perhaps hours to live indicates a military lack of intelligence. Let me reassess. Aimed at me facing imminent death, it’s a comment nothing less than inane.

“No, I am a bit weak, actually…” I lied. “I came over a bit dizzy…”

“Should I ring Gem?”

“No. I’ll be all right. I’ll be right as rain with a coffee inside me… There is a caff I know just up there on the left, just off the start of Essex Road. You seem not to be in a hurry today. Would you like to come for a coffee?”

Of course, I realized immediately I had just admitted to watching him prior to our meeting. How else would I have noticed his dawdling? As things turned out, it was probably a fortuitous blunder, because it prompted a defensive response. Where there might have existed only partial interest, suddenly there was a desire for more involvement, more knowledge. Perhaps he might have made an excuse, but now that he realised that I acted with purpose, he was clearly newly motivated to learn more.

“I was just on my way to… I had an appointment… Give me a moment.”

He took a few paces away from me. Why? Again, the phone in the left hand was stroked by a right index finger. He spoke in muted tones, placing himself between me and the busy street so I heard nothing of what was said, but within a minute he was back with me.

“I managed to postpone my meeting. Where do you want to go?”

I pointed in the general direction of Essex Road where my favourite greasy spoon was located.

“Would you mind taking my arm for a moment? I’m quite unsteady.” In fact, I was as steady as a rock. I was trying desperately to think on my feet, which also I had to move and, momentarily, that seemed to be a problem. Moving my feet had just become the difficult part, whether because of tiredness or a fundamental change in my body, I did not know. I was no longer hamming. That was probably why he seemed to distrust my words.

It was only fifty metres or so to the door of La Fenice, the all-London Italian-owned greasy spoon that locals would cite as traditional in the face of arguments from Brexit Remainers. Local it was, and always was, in terms of its food, all through the three generations of Ligurian owners, despite the fact that pasta with pesto figured large, as did homemade tiramisu. They also always had the regular offer of fried plates, lamb's liver, loads of chips and any construction of sarnie that a cosmopolitan mind might concoct. I knew what I wanted.

“What can I get you,” Geoff asked after seeing me into the wall side of a high-back bench seat, the perfect place for my ploy.

“I’ll have a coffee, a cappuccino with chocolate. And can you get me an ox tongue sandwich with English mustard on white?”

I could have been speaking a different language.

He grimaced, why I don’t know. But there was method in my madness. The first observation might relate to the fact that I adore ox tongue. Pressed beef tongue is not something that adorns the menus in caffs in Indonesia, where one usually has to make do with laksa, chap-chaai, nasi lemak or mee goreng. The second observation relates to the fact that I know my ingredients and my caffs. Ask for tuna mayo, cheese, any ham, pastrami, mortadella, peanut butter with strawberry jam, or even bacon and there will be a ready supply, pre-cooked, pre-sliced, pre-prepared in one cell of the matrix of plastic tubs that parade in orderly fashion across the width of the chilled display. Ox tongue, being a truly expensive ingredient, however, resides in the fridge. The bread, of course, is ready buttered, assembled back in its original wrapper in ready paired pieces, fatty sides facing, where only one piece of each binary selection needs to be lifted to accept its enclosure. Essentially, any sandwich you care to mention is assembled, cut and plated for eating in or bagged for taking out within a minute. But retrieving the tongue from the fridge means crossing the back of the counter to the far end, locating a plastic box in the fridge, extracting it, removing the snap-fit plastic lid, selecting a slice of tongue, always ensuring that the slice beneath is not disturbed in any way,

because breaking it would render it unsaleable, placing it on the awaiting bread, replacing the lid on the pot and taking the pot back to the fridge, and then spreading the other piece of bread with mustard. The extra minute that this would take allowed me to chance my arm. While Geoff waited, his vision of our table obscured by the high bench backs, I gambled that his phone had not yet re-adopted its security state and would still be active. He had left it on our table, realizing that he would need both hands to carry coffee and sarnies back from the bar. I swiped the screen, tapped the phone icon and then the log. There, atop a screen-filling list, were the names of the three people he had spoken to just a couple of minutes before. The first name was Elsie. I was not surprised. The next two I did not recognize immediately, but I do have the advantage of a photographic memory and Google did the rest. Long before Geoff returned on the first of his two trips back from the counter, I had already pressed the side button to power off the screen and put the machine back on standby.

"It takes a while to get one of those," he said, placing my sandwich carefully before me as he slid across to the seat opposite.

"Are you not having anything to eat?"

"I had breakfast before I came out."

"I can't do with all that cardboard box stuff," I said. "I prefer soup noodles, mee sup dengan daun dan cili."

"What's that?"

"Sorry, noodle soup with veg and chilli. Really sets you up for a hot day!"

“How are you feeling?” It wasn’t supposed to be a general enquiry, I’m sure, more of a request for an update on recent events.

“I feel strangely fine most of the time. But then a tiredness comes over me. I can’t predict it, and it has nothing to do with how active I have been. It comes on like it did a few moments ago, when I felt I couldn’t even lift my feet. A week ago, it happened once or twice a day. Now it comes on a lot more, possibly every hour.”

There was a particular look in his eyes. It said silently, “You don’t have long…” I said nothing, but communicated silently, “I know, you bloody fool!”

“I thought you were on your way to work when I saw you. I didn’t think I’d be able to catch up.”

He smiled inappropriately, condescendingly. “I had a home visit with a client. They live just around the corner, and I thought I would walk. But since I left home, I’ve been trying to contact them just to avoid arriving to find the house empty, or at least the door closed on me.”

“Happens often, does it?”

He shrugged. He was no better at hamming than me. “Not so often, but this was always going to be a risky one. It was to be one of those difficult occasions where the office is convinced that the claims being made just might be fraudulent.”

“Like a check… and inspection…”

“That kind of thing. It’s all done informally…”

“So that the people being inspected don’t realise what’s happening?”

“Pretty much.”

“And then they get their benefits cut…”

“If they have no right to them, yes.”

I decided to get to a point. “I thought you might be on your way to collect your mail…”

“My mail?” The look of confusion on that ever-so ordinary face was almost convincing.

“Down at The Angel, over the road… The big office building with all those occupancy plaques outside… The one with the security guard behind the desk on the left as you go in. The one where you have to show a pass to get in.” I made up the last part, but I knew it had to be true. “Which one of the listed companies on the outside do you work for?”

He now had to think quickly. As I took a large gulp of coffee, followed by a giant bite from the tongue sandwich, I rather let him off the hook, because inadvertently a piece of crust stuck in my throat. I coughed and almost regurgitated the bread. I loudly did the nose trick.

“Here,” he said, offering me a handful of napkins from the table dispenser by the wall.

“Sorry, there was more mustard than usual…” My eventual retrieval was better than the original pitch. “We thought you were a benefits clerk, but none of the concerns listed on that building have anything to do with the department of work and pensions, or local authorities, or any government office.”

“I work for an agency.”

“…to check up on benefit fraud?”

He nodded.

“Like a… like a freelance policeman?” I waited and watched, but he showed no signs of nibbling

the bait. “Are you on commission? Fifty pence or so for every taxpayer pound saved?”

It was surely the ‘freelance policeman’ that did throw him, however, just momentarily.

“The company has a contract. I’m effectively freelance.”

“Zero hours?”

He nodded.

“And the company’s name?”

“You wouldn’t know it.”

“But it would be on the list over there…” I nodded in the general direction of the office block at The Angel, implying that I might even go and check, a comment that brought a swift change of tack.

“Look, Edward. Are you sure you don’t want me to get you a taxi?”

“Sure.”

“You were quite unsteady back there.”

“It’s passed. I’ll get the nineteen bus from Upper Street.”

“I’ll have to be going…”

“A client to see, no doubt.”

“I do have to work for a living.”

“…and the soon dead…”

He finished his coffee and stood, but before he could bid his goodbyes, I got my knife in where it might hurt. “Oh, by the way, if you see Elsie before I do, could you let her know that I did try ringing on her behalf for jobseeker’s allowance, but got nowhere. Perhaps you could help… It’s rather in your line, presumably.” He nodded and, preferring silence to incriminating himself, turned and left.

Tongue sandwich tastily eaten, cappuccino drunk and savoured, bus nineteen up Holloway Road and home exhausted, I made my way up to the top floor, noting that, of course, I was alone in the house. Elsie must be out job-hunting, I murmured. I'll bet…

Lying on my bed, half-turned toward the trusty old laptop, I did a little Google detection. The first name on Geoff Sullivan's list of recent contacts, accurately memorised, the one that followed Elsie's on Geoff's phone, turned out to be Tanya Reddie, the journalist who wrote the piece in the local news about the Hackney riot, the piece that mentioned Elsie's employer by name and led to her sacking.

The other name proved harder to trace. The contact's first name, as listed on Geoff's list of calls was Al, which was clearly a diminutive. The surname was a common name and so I got pages of hits. I tried Alan, Albert, Alex, Alexander, Alphonse… I tried all the possible full versions as listed on the page Al (Given name) in Wikipedia. And then I realised I was being far too gender specific and tried a few female versions, Alexa, Alessanrda, and quite a number of others. I hit very lucky indeed with Alison, except with a 'y', Alysson. What a stupid name! But then things started to clear. The Alysson I found was another journalist, and quite a well-known one at that. Why I didn't think of her before, even when I first saw the name, defeats me. It was obvious in the end. The Alysson in question writes for a particular right-wing rag of a newspaper and now also features on a rather new, right-wing,

libertarian television news channel, where she presents a rolling, so-called news magazine for two hours every morning. Lo and behold, when I did my little bit of extra research, I found that she had devoted time on her show on each of the three previous days to none other than Uking Palace, specifically targeting the 'overtly left-wing' nature of the opposition to the project and spending considerable time analysing the role of a certain Elsie Pitcairn in organising the protests. I watched a clip on Youtube when she interviewed the minister who reportedly took the bribe to table the amended parliamentary motion that facilitated the by-passing of the planning rules. She questioned him on the validity of the process, but then merely accepted the apologetic response that acknowledged the criticism but then morphed into an aggressive dismissal of 'all these people who want to stand in the way of progress and development', followed by "we are working flat out to secure this ground-breaking deal to build the Uking Palace development". I also checked her Wikipedia entry. Now there's one thing that media people need more than anything else, and that is publicity. If they want a career, unless they are truly household names, they have to promote themselves, a practice that often results in such things as their favourite pets being recorded in the wiki entry. Unless, of course, they have another source of income, and they answer to another kind of boss. You can always tell a spook in the media, because their Wikipedia entry is short, succinct and utterly lacking in detail. Alysson Ward's entry tells us

that she grew up in Birmingham. We know the school she attended, and we can learn about which television programmes she has done. All three of them. And that's it. She's a spook. I also noted the fact that the log on Geoff's phone indicated that he had spent over an hour on that call this morning, hardly a swift complaint about media bias. And hardly a check that a potential benefit fraudster was, in fact, at home.

Just a few minutes extra work is all it took. I do not claim to be a whizz at using search engines, but I suppose the demands of library research over the years have morphed so that now interrogating a document resource is very much the same as an internet search. It tends to give narrower results, but one still has to be selective with one's filters and, crucially, creative with the terms one includes with a logical 'not'.

It was not so hard to find out that Alysson Ward was a lesbian. She has not written extensively on sexuality, but she has contributed to several jointly authored articles in the past during the era when gays were campaigning for greater recognition of civil partnerships. One particular joint authorship stood out. Coincidence is always the more likely culprit, but just occasionally co-authorship goes deeper than a pair of names at the head of an article. There were also some pictures of Alysson Ward on the internet. Most of them showed her wearing her formal, made-up, television face, itself almost compressed under the sweeping overhang of blond hair, so heavily lacquered that a gale would not dislodge it, that has become her trademark.

But not all photos of her show this official face, this product of the marketing company's manufactured profile. Some show her out walking the moors, rambling casually while amassing material for the specialist guides she writes under a pen name. It was then, remembering Geoff's gaff where he assumed that a single published photo of Penny Pitcairn represented the way she normally looked, that I realised that the multiplicity of pictures one normally sees of the media personality is not what she would look like if you met her on the street.

I recalled a memorable morning. A certain doctor named Khan had just completed his summary of my changed life chances. The morning did rather stick in the mind. I took a walk, I remember, and via Bedford Square and Russell Square finished in Coram Fields, where I spied a certain Mr. Sullivan meeting with someone I thought I recognised. Well, I now know that the person on the bench was Alysson Ward wearing her day-to-day face for a day-to-day meeting with my daughter's bloke. And the name of Alysson Ward's partner? It is a certain Wendy Davis, the journalist on The News who has been so interested in offering perspectives on Uking Palace.

Internal assessment

Stephen Westerman, since he is in his mid to late thirties and roughly the same stature, is judged to be a story worth pursuing. There are some anomalies, but when there can be no way to verify physical characteristics other than gender, stature, rough age and presence, we can assume that he will be suitable material. As ever, it is the history and detail of a life that forms our greatest interest, since it is via these, the social contacts, the family, the profession, the accidentals, or indeed by their absence, that we come to know an individual and thus recognize identity. In the case of Stephen Westerman, the process of identifying potential contacts has been extensive and thorough.

Stephen Westerman was once a happy man. It lasted just a few years, and followed the start of a serious relationship, the first and perhaps only one he ever made with other people. Since then, he has almost toyed with life at arm's length, neither ever fully engaging with his interests, nor shunning anything to the point of rejection, but also never really engaging in anything that might be called friendship. It might be said that life has lived him, so consistently does he seem to have been the passive recipient of its diktats.

Of course, we only know a person via the memories and experiences of others. When we can no longer respond to life's inputs, it is what we have left in the lives of others that lives on, and that only for a generation. Beyond that, a fiction of reinvention takes over. For most of us,

we die with the death of the memories we left, not when the body's functions are caused to stop. So, if we want to know how the demise of an individual might be perceived, then we must identify and describe the contacts met in that life, the memories that might have been created, and the experience potentially retained by others.

Stephen Westerman was raised by two sets of foster parents. The first foster home was a success, but by the time he reached the second, he had become a difficult, highly active and emotional child. He spent much of his childhood in care, shunted from place to place and never settling anywhere.

He was born to Stephanie Ormsby in nineteen eighty-two. She was fifteen, unmarried and a Catholic. The school record at Saint Mary's Girls' School, Everby, West Yorkshire, described her as being, on occasions, rather headstrong, opinionated, rebellious, and unconventional, so there was a sense of mere confirmation, a distinct 'I told you so', when she had to go on extended leave. To protect identities, of course, names, addresses and institutions are fictitious, but any interested reader with the requisite authority can access these files unredacted.

When Stephanie announced that she was pregnant, her family, an almost prototypical northern English, working-class Catholic household, clearly had no way of coping with her condition, either economically or emotionally. For them, a pregnant and unmarried fifteen-year-old was an oxymoron, a state that could not even be imagined, or envisaged, let alone accepted.

She was one of four children in what could be seen as a model family, steady, caring, devout, sharing and supportive, but also viciously judgemental. The parents, both deceased, conformed to that archetypal Yorkshire mould of the work-a-day father and the stay-at-home mother. Dad worked on the railways and had done since leaving school at the end of the forties, to experience the last full decade of steam, and be entranced by it to the same extent he was by his religious faith, and then to live, via its demise, with a permanent, almost cynical sense of bereavement. His workmates would joke that Ernie had last smiled in 1968, on seeing television pictures of the last steam departure, a Britannia class pull, the mere memory of which would bring tears to his eyes.

His wife, Mary, had Irish roots, lived for her children and her family, while being permanently devoted full time to saving her public face. She attended mass every Sunday, religiously, if that's not understood, and would go to church irregularly on weekday mornings after walking her children to school, 'just to stay on the right side of things', as she used to say.

The couple had known one another for some time, but had married only in 1956, after a two-year engagement, during which they had both saved regularly, paying money into their still separate Post Office accounts on a weekly basis, always in cash. By the time the big day came, it could justly be celebrated in the current style with a mass and slap-up meal in one of those middle-class 1950s institutions, The Country

Club, where solicitors, doctors, bank managers, the occasional successful clerk and any other aspirants to social mobility and even membership of the Golf Club could rub shoulders in a quick step on the dance floor, before enjoying the obligatory chicken or scampi and chips in the basket.

For Ernie and Mary, Stephanie was the last of four, a late child, possibly a mistake, born in 1967, separated from her older siblings by more than seven years. Stephanie, it seems, was never close to her two brothers and sister, who had already married, had children and were leading their own family lives before Stephanie fell pregnant.

Neither, it seems, did Stephanie have much time for her parents. The school records have numerous letters about her, a correspondence that was conducted equally in both directions, where the parents, mainly her mother, forever conscious of her own perceived respectability, would describe her daughter as out of control, a black sheep, a misfit or even an embarrassment. The school, to its credit, always used less emotive language, but it is clear her teachers and parents shared the same judgment of Stephanie, condemnatory, albeit in a different language, on both sides. At one point, Mary Ormsby resigned herself to prayer as the only remaining avenue of assistance for her daughter, a strategy which the local parish priest still remembers helping to formulate.

Stephanie grew up in the seventies. Infancy and primary school seem to have passed without

much note, except to record occasional tantrums, for which no obvious cause or pattern could be identified. As she grew up, she had less to do with her siblings or even friends, preferring her own company to that of others, a description of her first recorded before she reached ten. In her teens, she became the archetypal punk. She regularly wore a coloured streak in her hair, washed it out, put it back, cut it out, sometimes hid it under a scarf in the short term at the behest of the school, a school that strictly proscribed head coverings inside the buildings, unless, of course, that building was a church, when wearing one was strictly obligatory. At home, there was little contact with siblings. A brother joined the army and never came home after an overseas posting to Germany. Another brother was a sales representative and spent most of his days traveling the country, and apparently becoming so tired that, on a day off, his travel could almost never extend to see his parents in Everby. The sister had never got on with her father, describing him once in public as a ‘drunken slob, fit for the pub but nowt else’. She had married at sixteen, had three children before the age of twenty, and had to spend her little spare time managing the finances for her housebuilder husband, who went on to operate a sizable and successful company in Leeds. Contact between the Ormsby parents and their daughter ceased completely when the prosperity-driven class divide separated them completely.

Though it is not recorded explicitly anywhere in any form, family contacts have mentioned that

there developed significant resentment among the elder three children at what they perceived as Stephanie's relatively privileged status. Privileged, that is, when compared to the austere fifties and early sixties in which they themselves were raised. As a late child, she had been treated from the start as if she were an only child, with all the undivided attention that often brings. And, it must be noted, the Ormsby family, having already brought up three children in that previous decade, had begun to share a little of the generally increased affluence that the sixties brought, an affluence they grasped to bestow upon the youngest child many material privileges that the others had been denied.

But it all went wrong, horribly wrong, perhaps because of the conflict that arose between the child of an increasingly secular age and a devout Roman Catholic mother, fixed on saving her church, her face and her own soul within it. The reaction, perhaps, was inevitable. Its eventual product, Stephen, his mother's namesake became its burden.

Stephanie had been going to pubs for a year. She had a group of friends who stayed out late, who, because of cash flow, drank little, but spent a lot of time in the area's discotheque pubs, a social institution that grew out of a lack of municipal spaces that could attract youth. Each town had its venue. Even small places, even villages, would have that one ale house that would set up a tower of flashing lights on one midweek night, import a disc jockey and a sound system, and proceed to feed the current top

twenty, plus the occasional golden oldie, to receptive ears at ninety decibels via speakers better suited to station announcements. But the punters used to lap it up, with many such a venue crowded to overflowing with underage drinkers. It was an age of experimentation, tolerance and freedom. But it was also an age of a knee-jerk retrenchment, of tut-tutting self-righteousness expressed to the strains of ‘they ought to know better’, mixed with ‘I don’t know what the youth of today get up to’, even if overactive imaginations were all too ready to fill in the gaps.

After one such midweek aural experience, Stephanie lost her virginity to a lad she had met that night and had immediately fancied, pausing for a few minutes in a bus shelter on a council estate in nearby Westbury. She went to the same disco a week later, intent on interesting another interested party, did just that and fell pregnant as a result. She only did it twice, a week apart, so the dates are identifiable. The father, the second encounter, was at the time and still remains unknown, a stranger, who answered to the name of Paul. He seems to have been, and have remained, anonymous, untraceable, just another older male who woke up the next morning unable to remember how many pints he had drunk the night before.

Stephanie, perhaps having resolved that she should be more careful, perhaps sensing there might be something wrong, did not go to the disco for the next three weeks. The behaviour change may have resulted from other problems and her eagle-eyed mother noticed immediately.

Her behaviour at school was a problem at the time and she was excluded, a process that meant she stayed at home for two weeks, during which a meeting was organized between her head of year, her class teacher, parents Ernie and Mary, plus an educational psychologist, who took copious notes of proceedings, case notes that are still on Stephanie school records.

Stephanie was allowed back into school, where, after a couple of quiet weeks, she mis-behaved again, calling one of the elderly nuns, “a concentration camp guard”, with multiple expletives added. She was again excluded from school, had an enormous run-in with her mother and ran away from home. As in many such cases, however, she ran only as far as a friend’s house, where she stayed the night to be discovered by another angry mother the next morning, still in bed, having persuaded her normally disciplined and meek friend to bunk the day off school.

Returned to home and greeted with the undiluted anger of both her parents, who had both rung in sick to look for her, the father to work, the mother to the priest to announce she would not be at mass, Stephanie announced she had already missed two periods and was ‘up the spout’. Her father left the house. Her mother hit her several times, left a blackeye and bruising around the ear and cheek that social workers recorded in detail, along with the rest of Stephanie’s recent history, a report, which, of course, was the source of the above. Dad did come home but he never again spoke to his daughter. Her mother effectively disowned her,

made her prepare her own meals, launder her own clothes and do her own shopping and cooking.

When Stephanie's bump started to show, a cartel comprising the school's headteacher, the local priest and Stephanie's parents arranged an extended holiday for her, which was spent in what at the time were euphemistically called 'mother and baby homes', euphemistically because the home was never to be for the baby, which, as soon as possible, was always going to be parcelled off for adoption.

The intention, of course, was that Stephanie should go home after giving birth, return to school and finish her education. The adoption was swift, not swift enough for Mary Ormsby, though it must be noted, quick enough so that there never developed any bond between the child and its mother. We cannot even ascertain from the records whether Stephanie actually ever saw her child. Stephen, christened by Stephanie in her own image during her extended labour, was taken by a couple called Richards, a childless, older couple, already in their thirties, already at an age that ran counter to recommended adoption practices at the time. The problem was noted, but not seen as crucial.

Stephanie did go home and did return to school. Her mother still shunned her. Her father would not speak to her. Her classmates all knew precisely what had happened, because the first thing Stephanie did was tell them all, from the front of the room, on her feet beside an embarrassed but powerless biology teacher, who

tried to wrestle her to silence. He was transferred and she was excluded from school again, this time with an associated threat of expulsion. She ran away from home for a second time, spent a week in a hotel in London at an address a friend had supplied, met a stranger, and left the country just three months after the birth on the flight to Perth, Australia. Her partner's name was never recorded, but he clearly was on the same flight as her, so there is an avenue for further tracing work. It was, after all, the era when London was known for its young Australian overland tourists, who generally lived itinerant lives in then cheap hotels in Earl's Court, making a living from casual work. It is distinctly possible that Stephanie Ormsby met such a person during her hotel stay and entered into a relationship.

Stephanie, having cleared immigration at Perth, simply disappeared, having probably gone to live with her new partner, changed her name and started a new life, somewhere outside of the urban area. All traceable names on the passenger list from 1982 have been researched and none of them can be associated with the Stephanie Ormsby who travelled on the same flight. There remain several names from that list who cannot be traced in any of Perth's city records or indeed any extant records of western Australia. We may suggest that Stephanie's new partner might have been a cash-paid worker in the mining industry. No matches have been found, but employment data from that time is either scant or non-existent. It is possible that the woman who was

Stephanie Ormsby is still alive and resident somewhere in Western Australia, possibly even using her original name. If she is still alive, it is more likely that she is using a changed name, since no financial or data link can be traced to the name Stephanie Ormsby. Crucially for us, I can find no attempt by any western Australian resident to trace an adopted child originating from that particular area of West Yorkshire. There exist numerous organisations devoted to assist such tracing, but just a few handle the vast majority of such work. I have trawled their records, even posed as Stephen Ormsby attempting to trace his mother. I have devoted significant time to this in order to establish whether Stephen is completely disowned by his family. I can generate no possible contact in Australia and no original family member responded to any request. The enquiries, undoubtedly, happen anonymously, so we may assume that had anyone been interested in the name, then a response would have been forthcoming. Even Stephen's siblings would have received a message of the kind, "a possible acquaintance from your past request you make contact." No one messaged would have been aware of a link to Stephen, but also no one contacted even opened the message.

Stephen Ormsby became Stephen Richards before he himself could talk. The Richards, unlikely foster parents according to the rules, proved to be models of the uneventful but devoted type. In his early years, Stephen Richards seemed to grow up a balanced child

with no particular needs, no bad health, good school reports and no behaviour problems, at least until the age of seven. This was the only period of stability in Stephen's life and the family life he lived with his foster parents represent the only genuine personal relationship he ever knew.

The family lived in West Yorkshire, in a large stone built, nineteenth century detached house with a surround garden. Stepfather was a solicitor and stepmom was a practising doctor, who gave up her chance of professional advancement to bring up her new child, preferring to work part time as a peripatetic in the surgery where she had previously been based.

They cut the perfect image of a middle-class family, very much self-reliant and self-contained, so much so that when both parents lost their lives in a car accident, almost none of their friends could recall anything about their foster child. Some could recall his existence, of course, but none could describe him in any more detail than he used 'to play on the hearth rug' or 'he was a sweet little boy'. The Richards, it seemed, formed not only a nuclear family, but also an insulated one, insulated ideologically, perhaps, a trait that had led to Stephen being home schooled by his mother.

Stephen Richards was strapped into a child seat in the rear of the family car when it was hit head on by a speeding Range Rover, driven by a deranged and drunken farmer, who had just had a major argument with his wife about his drinking. The Richards died instantly. Stephen

was extracted from the wreckage with not a single scratch.

Stephen was seven years old, already a person, already culturally formed, thoroughly middle-class in the image of his proud foster parents. He had no trace of his birth-parents' accent (we presume his father to have been a local lad), had been given what can only be described as elocution lessons by his parents, and spoke with a southern English long 'a', a fact that marked him out from his peers sufficiently for some of his primary school teachers to remember calling him la-di-dah.

Stephen then spent three years in a local authority care facility, where he was severely bullied. At first, he seemed stoical, relatively unaffected by his trauma, but some months after the accident he 'fell apart' in the words of one staff member in a written report. He became completely withdrawn for most of the time, but occasionally, probably no more than once a month, he would become uncontrollably active, even violent, and had to be restrained. He would quieten after sedation, but the process was repeated many times. When, at the age of ten, turning eleven years old, he was subjected to two almost simultaneous transformations, a tall order for any child, surely an impossibility for one so emotionally unstable. At this stage, we must remember, Stephen Richards had no idea he had once been Stephen Ormsby and had no reason to believe that he had not just lost his real mother and father in a car accident.

The two changes were a new school, secondary school at a comprehensive in the nearby large city, and another future home, this time to another childless couple called Westerman, hence Stephen's current surname. The couple had been on the adoption list for only a few months and, it might be argued, had not been certainly vetted as to the suitability. The written case notes indicate however, that Stephen's problems were thought to be caused by his institutional status, and that they would probably subside if he returned to a family environment. The theory was probably correct. The practice, however, proved inappropriate.

Danny Westerman had no history of violence. He was, it must be recognized, about as far removed from the young Stephen as it was possible to be in terms of his social class, his societal status and no doubt, his attitude. It might be argued, if we recall Stephen's experience to the age of seven, that the Westermans were inappropriate foster parents, given the vast gulf in social class and culture between them and the younger Stephen. It must be remembered, however, that Stephen had been in care for three years or so. The judgment at the time was that his former life was already remote and would continue to fade.

Danny Westerman seemed to resent the boy's accent and his middle-class behaviour, deciding from the start that he should learn to 'talk proper'. The new stepfather also inculcated a trait that would become important later in Stephen's life, that of overt, aggressive racism.

He tried to teach the eleven-year-old boy to point at ethnic minority people in the street, telling the boy that these people were bad, taking white people's jobs, invading the country, polluting the population with the dark skin and dirty genes.

Why these attitudes had not been noted in Danny Westerman before the adoption can possibly be explained by the fact that he, himself, had only attended two of the four occasions when the prospective parents met with assessors, and only the shorter two of the four meetings, meetings at which the prospective foster father was described as quiet, even reticent. Daniel's wife was potentially a model foster-mother and had been assessed as a perfect match for Stephen. In reality, however, it was Daniel who intervened to take over the lion share of Stephen's formation, obviously intent on transforming him into a model of the person he, himself, had always wanted to be, proud, strong, white supremacist, assertive. When the child did not respond as the foster-father wished, Danny beat him.

Danny beat Stephen with his fists, with his belt, sometimes with the poker, sometimes with anything that came to hand. Social services were called, and within a year, Stephen was back in local authority care and the couple had split up. Daniel Westerman was later sectioned and is currently detained in a secure site, permanently sedated and being treated for schizophrenia. His wife, whose name has thus far been deliberately omitted, immediately divorced him and remarried, not telling her new husband anything

of the fostering of Stephen. She died of Covid last year, having had no children of her own, and we may assume that her widower, to this day, has no knowledge whatsoever of his former wife's foster child. There exists no contact avenue back to Stephen from that source.

Back in institutional care, Stephen's tantrums grew worse. He was rarely in education, where he was regarded in all three secondary schools he attended as uncontrollable and uncommunicating. He hit several teachers, was suspended or expelled from all three institutions and finally ended up on roll again at the first one he started, though, during this second spell of official attendance at the school, he never attended. He made no friends, created no lasting memories, obtained no qualifications and certainly learned little.

He left school at sixteen and was described as 'unemployable' when he had an interview at the local job centre. At seventeen he absented himself from care and worked for cash in various locations, never staying in one place for more than a few weeks and leaving no rental or occupation records. What he did, where he lived and with whom he interacted during the next seven years can only be pieced together via fragments.

There are Social Security records, occasionally, from employers, but nothing that suggests any more than a couple of months of regular employment each time. There were occasions when he appeared before magistrates on drunk and disorderly charges, but these all resulted in

fines, which he was apparently able to pay. He was bound over, but never sent to prison. He clearly stole, but what or from whom was never identified, indicating perhaps that it was always low-level pilfering that sustained him. There are no medical or dental records for him whatsoever for the period, none, of course, until that day in June when he was twenty-five years old.

He was in Leeds, in Chapeltown. There exist journalistic reports of these events, so locating them poses no confidentiality problems. It was in the early hours on a warm summer evening when local residents were sleeping with the windows open, so they could hear all the disturbance as it happened. Several residents called the police when they heard the screams.

It seemed, following investigations, that Stephen had made contact with a streetwalking prostitute and negotiated a price. They had gone to her flat and she had asked for her money, but Stephen had hit her, overpowered her, raped her and had already left the house, when the girl's minders caught up with him in the street outside. It seems that the gang contained black faces and Stephen had racially abused them, just to add to his existing problems. He was identified immediately after the event by name tag sewn into his trousers, indicating that he had accessed a hostel with communal laundry facilities in the past. His attackers took his jacket, wallet, his shoes and even his shirt, The trousers obviously not being worth the trouble. They left Stephen unconscious, disfigured and brain damaged. Though, as recorded above, the case was

reported in the media, there is no evidence of anyone trying to contact Stephen during his several weeks in hospital, despite the publication of those contemporary newspaper reports that described his fate.

With no family, and, apparently, no friends or acquaintances, at least none willing to seek him out, he stayed in hospital and then convalescent care in a mental facility for the next two years. He had permanently lost the ability to speak, and temporarily to walk, though this facility did return, albeit with it with a limp that to this day looks like a stumble at every step.

Although under surveillance and in need of nursing care, he managed to abscond after he had been transferred to a secure unit near London because of his special needs. He has spent the years intervening between then and now sleeping rough in London. Whether he knows he is in London is hard to say, since his verbal communication skills never returned, the best he can manage being an unintelligible mumble married to a forceful proximity of presence that most find disconcerting.

Stephen Westerman is currently sedentary. He sleeps in a doorway near Kings Cross station, where he begs. He buys beer and chocolate bars in shops nearby, but none of the owners regard him as anything other than a nuisance All say they would rather he did not enter their premises, since he sleeps rough, is always dirty and never washes. He smells strongly of urine, so if he is to be of any use, he will have to be taken in hand and cleaned up prior to deployment. He

is of the right age and stature, he has no medical or dental records and, for over ten years, has had no relationships with other people significant enough for them to remember him or even to learn anything about him. He has never owned a mobile phone, a credit card or bank account, an email address or a computer, so therefore has no online presence whatsoever. Crucially, he has no current status with any service. He is therefore perfect for our needs. I therefore confirm that the proposed course of action is viable.

Edward Pitcairn confronts his granddaughter

One good point about the conduct of this project was the care to which our agent managed his physical resources. With the older members of the household this was not to prove crucial, but with Elsie Pitcairn, who always downloaded software updates to her mobile as they became available, it was essential that our software was also reinstalled on her phone regularly. Some of the system updates are effectively rebuilds of the entire system, so our resident app also is sometimes erased. Our operative, however, made sure the new links to our software were always available to her and, because of the relationship of trust that had been developed, Elsie would usually cooperate within a day or two by clicking on that all important link to reinstall our app. Her trust in the link appeared to be a direct consequence of what we originally interpreted as her trust in her colleague in the Off Uking Palace group. With the benefit of hindsight, which is always easier than analysis, it is possible that Elsie's cooperation was conspiratorial.

At least that is what our analysis had been until this particular day, a morning when Edward decided to confront his granddaughter, "to get things out into the open," as he himself had put it the night before, as he mumbled to himself in bed. The meeting took place just a day after Edward's ox tongue on white with Geoff Sullivan in La Fenice, the greasy spoon cafe on Essex Road. Elsie's app, as evidenced by the verbatim transcript that follows, was working, as was the

remote control of the phone's camera, which also allowed some visually sourced contextual observation to be included. But what was worrying, apart from the content of the discussion, was the fact that Elsie's behaviour throughout suggested that she was aware of the monitoring, even to be consciously facilitating it. The proceedings were transcribed by one of our own monitoring clerks, so the significance of these words is still secure knowledge. Further comments have been appended by an informed observer who reviewed the file. The original document has the attributed source of each observation.

There was a knock on the bedroom door. "Just a minute," called Elsie. She had not yet bothered to dress, was still propped up in bed and, having decided to lie in, was reviewing her social media via her phone. As she rose, she placed the phone carefully on the corner of the table by the window, the corner that protruded furthest into the room.

"It's only me…" Edward Pitcairn's voice sounded especially weak on the far side of the Edwardian panelled door.

"Just a minute, grandaddy," she said, taking some care apparently to ensure that her phone's resting place was safe. Elsie quickly crossed back towards her bed and, almost in a single movement, retrieved a one-piece smock, a large, floor length black and brown batik garment with highly decorative arabesque decoration from the back of the chair at her bedside and flung it over her head, allowing the fabric's own weight to fall

about her. She took the four steps to the bedroom door, turned the squeaking white ceramic handle and pulled, revealing Edward Pitcairn through the open doorway on the landing, looking rather small, obviously tired and, for the first time, noticeably stooped.

“Am I disturbing…” It was not a question. He was already crossing the threshold into the room.

“No, grandaddy. Come in. Sit down. You don’t look well.”

Edward Pitcairn stopped in his tracks. He paused and gave his granddaughter the kind of sidelong stare, almost out of one eye, that said, “And bloody obvious why” without uttering a word.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “It’s the yoga. I seem to have got used to having my foot in my mouth.”

“Don’t worry, Elsie. I’ve learned that you soon have to get used to such things. And look at what you’re wearing. I feel quite at home.” Familiarity momentarily brightened his voice.

“You are at home. It’s your house.”

“You know what I mean. It’s like being back in Indonesia. Though what you are wearing is not exactly from my neck of the woods.” Elsie asked a wordless but understood question. “It’s from Madura,” said Edward, taking a detailed interest in the garment’s design, “north of Java. It’s a very different culture up there.”

“Here, sit down,” she said, pulling the chair that a minute before had been the bedside hanger for her gown and placing it next to the large, Victorian table with spirally worked legs that occupied the entire width of the room’s

double window. The chair legs screeched across the floorboards, momentarily overloading the mobile's microphone. The tabletop was covered with files, make-up, various bags, ornaments, papers, at each end a couple of Anglepoise lamps (seventies Habitat vintage, specifically purchased second hand) and at least two unwashed coffee cups with dregs from the night before. The telephone that she had so carefully placed sat precariously on the very edge of that same table, fortuitously positioned as luck would have it, or perhaps deliberately placed for maximum coverage. She cleared a space large enough for his supporting forearm to rest and set the chair, so it faced her bed. Elsie helped Edward toward the seat, into which he flopped with an over-loud, overdone sigh. She then retreated to her bed, which was single and set against the side wall, so she could sit across it, her back to the wall, her legs drawn up folded onto the mattress at her front, facing her grandfather.

"This feels a bit like an official visit," she said.

"It is. Am I really that transparent?"

"I think the last time you knocked to come into my room was over a decade ago."

"You make it sound like I come here often…," he said with an ironic smile.

She smiled back, her genuine affection for him both lengthening and broadening the gesture. "You made some phone calls for me, I hear."

He nodded. "Funny, I thought I was going to kick things off... I told Gem yesterday. So, you spoke?" Elsie's nods acknowledged his words. He continued, "But I didn't get anywhere…"

“Surprise, surprise… I’m not going to claim any benefits anyway. I…”

“It’s your entitlement, Elsie.”

“I know, I know. But I also know that it works like a branding iron within places where I work. If I carry on and apply for work, I can spin the story that I am just seeking something better, between jobs and the like. If I sign on, I become unemployed and therefore, in the eyes of many, unemployable. They won’t even look at me. The cv will go in the bin.”

“How did it come to this?”

“You know and I know that I got busted by the police, carted off like a carcass, cuffed and charged.”

“Resisting arrest…”

She nodded. “Make it up as you go along.”

He paused, looked long and hard at her, but there was sympathy in his expression, not even a suggestion of judgment. It was a gesture she seemed to acknowledge with a nod of thanks. “It’s such a bloody mess…”

“Bloody? Not yet. But that might change.”

“How on earth did your employer get mixed up in it?”

“I have no idea. Well, let me rephrase that. I have every idea. Let me rephrase that. I know precisely how it came about.”

Edward Pitcairn did not speak. The silence that he managed asked his question, which was implicitly understood.

“I gave my personal details only to the two officers who took my statement, one male and one female, obligatory, of course. The name of my

employer was written on that official document, which ought to have stayed official, and confidential."

"But it didn't…"

"Obviously." She paused but Edward waited for her to continue. "Even before I was back at work on the Monday morning, they had already been told about the content of the statement. The woman who sacked me was kind enough to send me a text a couple of days ago. She said that she was briefed on the Sunday evening in a phone call with one of the directors. She was told then she would be tasked with letting me go. She told me they had used our meeting to assess her management skills. Let's say I didn't congratulate her."

"But the newspaper article didn't appear until the Tuesday…"

"And she was told two days before it was published to quote its detail to me."

"But why? What does anyone gain from sacking you?"

Elsie laughed a little. It was a smirk that judged. "Nothing whatsoever to do with publicity. Nothing whatsoever to do with besmirching the company name. Nothing at all to do with tabloid mud getting thrown. Nothing at all to do with me, professionally, or my performance in my job." She paused. Edward clearly had anticipated what would follow. "You-know-who on the board and his mate both are donors to the Tories. Our group, Off Uking Palace, has repeatedly publicised the link between a certain minister and the obviously remunerated easing of

planning rules in East London. My face suddenly did not fit. I had trodden on toes, so they wanted to see the back of me…"

"Face, toes, back… Any other part of your anatomy involved?"

Elsie laughed. "I could say they got on my tits, but it would be inappropriate in mixed company."

Edward inserted a lengthy pause, his mind clearly elsewhere for a while. He seemed to be scrutinising his granddaughter's appearance. For a moment, she seemed uncomfortable. "You know," he said, "you really are like Penny. You have the same mannerisms, the same direct way of cutting crap."

"I wish I had got to know her better…"

"You were young. It's hard to believe she's been dead nearly seventeen years…"

"It's funny, but I can hardly remember being around when the two of you were together. Christmas, birthdays, yes, but never really any time when the three of us spent any time together. Of course, you were away quite often…"

"I suppose I was. Australia wasn't exactly around the corner, I suppose…but then Elsie, you were only seven when Penny passed away."

The silence lasted several seconds. Edward was clearly lost in memories. Elsie clearly was wondering how to broach the subject. Eventually she spoke. "Tell me about Gina."

The direct stab threw him. He had not come to be pilloried. Though sitting, he almost visibly stumbled before he found words offered to stall. "You mean Dr. Chupesi?"

“Grandad, I know what I am talking about. You know what I am talking about. Let’s cut the crap or cut the scene. Let’s talk about Gina. Mom told me years ago. I never met her. I am interested…”

Edward Pitcairn muttered something about “media people” under his breath before continuing. “Gina Chupesi was very good to me…”

“Euphemism…”

“OK, so we slept together! Is it a crime?”

“Did grandma know?”

“I suppose she did…”

“You never told her?”

“Not as such… Not in so many words… But ours was an open relationship.”

“Sounds pretty closed to me.”

Edward gave another of his histrionic sighs. “We were children…”

“Here we go… children of the sixties, living the usual list, free, open, free love, peace, power to the people, ban the bomb!”

“Yes, all of that, yes. But you misinterpret the word ‘open’. As we used it, the term meant ‘no questions asked’.”

“So did you ever ask grandma if she was having an affair?”

Edward thought for a moment. “It didn’t really arise…”

“…because she never was, was she?”

Edward shrugged. “Not to my knowledge. She was not as interested in the physical side of marriage as I was.”

“Was she frigid?”

“Most certainly not! But she had a very rough time with Gemma. She didn’t want another pregnancy…”

“And there was no birth control in the sixties?”

“Of course, there was…”

“So you looked elsewhere.” Elsie paused, looked directly at Edward, leaned forward slightly and then settled back against the wall. “Repeatedly.”

“Your grandma and I were always deeply in love with one another. We expressed things in different ways. Being who I am, I would probably have gone on the prowl even if our sex life had been the best ever….”

“You were just made that way…”

“I suppose.”

Elsie did not interject. There was no malice in her words, only an apparent curiosity, calculatedly naïve in order to draw as much from him as possible. She thought there would be more to follow, but Edward Pitcairn used the pause to change tack, to address the question that prompted him to confront his granddaughter that morning.

“Else…”

“Now I know you want something. The diminutive to prepare the ground…” She smiled.

“Media people,” he muttered. “Elsie, I’ve been meaning to ask you…”

“About Geoff Sullivan. I know.”

Momentarily, he was speechless. He had clearly thought for hours how he might broach the subject of Elsie’s relationship with Geoff, who, as was obvious, was also still sharing her

mother's bed a few times each month. What he had not expected was that his granddaughter might actually take the lead in the discussion. There followed what sounded like a long silence, but which in reality lasted all of four seconds. He made an open armed gesture, just a lift of the forearms, opened palms, fingers spread. "Well?"

"It's not what you think."

"That's not what I heard the other morning."

She did not reply straight away. Edward Pitcairn seemed to see this as an expression of embarrassment, a silence that sought a way of ending itself but found none. Later study of the moment interpreted the same reticence as Elsie Pitcairn retaining control of the exchange. She wanted him to continue, presumably to divulge his interpretation before she offered anything more.

"It was pretty clear to me, Else. It was obviously quite a… a passionate encounter."

"Did you mention it to Mum?"

Again, he thought long and hard about his answer. "I thought I had better talk to you first I didn't want to upset her…"

"It's an open relationship…"

"Elsie…"

"Between you and me, that's what 'open' means. She knows. She knows I am sleeping with Geoff."

Edward Pitcairn was utterly flabbergasted, rendered speechless, his lips mouthing soundless words beneath expressionless eyes, like the reflex actions of a severed head. "She knows?" he said eventually.

“I’m trying to protect her.”

He looked on again in disbelief. “Did you say protect? From what?”

Now it was Elsie’s turn to pause. She had not moved during the conversation, having planted her back against the bedroom wall, her feet on the bed before her and her arms clasped around her knees, the folds of her voluminous but strangely stiff robe remaining almost sculpted by her inactivity.

“Geoff is not all that he seems.”

“I was just about to say that,” he commented, his voice indicating that reality might just be receding into the distance at speed.

“He’s not telling the truth. To anyone,” she said. Now this was news to us. We had been wondering about Geoff Sullivan’s apparent conquest of Gemma’s daughter, an apparently purely physical relationship that had begun only a few days before. There seemed to be something manufactured about the way things happened, an arguably deliberate absence from home on Gemma’s part, to attend an out of hours meeting at work, a fabrication as things turned out. Elsie, who usually drank alcohol only in moderation, had bought in beers and wine and told Geoff that she knew how disappointed he would be about her mother’s not being at home. She had decided, she told him, to make up for the disappointment by cooking him a meal and having a chat. She had him in bed before she had even lit the gas. Geoff Sullivan, of course, was the complete sucker, taking the bait and swallowing it whole. He needed no introduction to Elsie because they

had already been attending meetings and demonstrations together for some months, but he ought to have noticed that this was just a little too good to be true, a little too much out of character to be sincere. It must be recorded here that this was an error of judgment on his part.

A full verbatim transcript is available via a secure logon, so to avoid repetition let us summarize the next few minutes. Edward related his story about discovering that Geoff was visiting a building near The Angel which, apparently, he used as a mailing address. He described the lies about the phone calls he had made during the meeting that led to the café on Essex Road. He also described how Geoff had bluffed his way through his non-recognition of Penny Pitcairn's identity, despite claiming to have attended a school where she had worked, but where she had only been known by her maiden name.

Elsie proceeded to surprise Edward, saying that she had suspected Geoff Sullivan for some time, suspected his motives, then his sincerity. What had triggered the suspicions had been Geoff Sullivan's consistent tendency in meetings, in public gatherings, in discussions of anything to do with Off Uking Palace to advocate the most confrontational tactics, always expressed in the most provocative language. And, given his lead, when others followed, there developed a momentum that would become hard to oppose and impossible to halt. From the point of view of the campaign, this was tactically not subtle, even at the time judged unproductive. Elsie and others had wondered whether Geoff's aim was always to

provoke the campaign to extreme, potentially headline-grabbing action that could then be used to further the opposing standpoint's position. She and others involved in Off Uking Palace had deliberately started to feed him with false information, which, days later, had appeared in the media, or had found its way back to its originators, confirming that it had been leaked to a third-party. Elsie had taken matters into her own hands, her own bed, in fact, having spoken about her suspicions with her mother, who recalled similar behaviour from him when they worked together on Brexit, anomalous behaviour that at the time had been dismissed as merely part of the overall confusion that surrounded the issue. The two of them had talked and agreed on their strategy to trap their prey.

"And it was Geoff who leaked the details of my police statement to the press."

Edward's surprise had gradually subsided as the story progressed. "Do you think he's a policeman? Something like the demonstration unit from a couple of decades ago?"

"He might be. But he seems too unguided for that… I think he's a private operator."

"What, in it purely for himself? Selling information?"

"No, private in the sense that he works for a private agency."

"Funded by Uking."

"Precisely. Among others, no doubt."

"It would explain a lot. For some reason, someone had been employing him to inform on Gemma's Brexit work. The Uking job came up

and he was the perfect match to do the work, having already established a relationship with the family. It seems he might have been simply retained with a different brief."

Again, Edward and Elsie shared the silence, a calm during which she remained statuesque, but saw Edward become a veritable effervescence of ticks and twitches. He scratched his head, rubbed his neck, adjusted his position on his chair, sighed, rubbed his eyes. It took about a minute for Elsie to realize he was crying and, manfully trying to hide it.

"Edward, are you all right?"

"That same stupid question…"

"I'm sorry…"

He wiped his eyes on his sleeve, then bowed head taking several seconds to return close to a vertical. "I thought…"

"You thought I might be being as duplicitous as you were?" Elsie's tactics were certainly not defensive.

Edward was suddenly aggressive. "That was below the belt."

"It's the only place that counts, grandad."

Edward by now was not capable of hiding the tears that rolled down his cheeks. Elsie rose from her interrogatory pose on the bed, retrieved a box of tissues from the mantelpiece behind her grandfather and handed it to him. She took a couple of the paper handkerchiefs in her hand and dabbed his cheeks. Edward Pitcairn closed his eyes and cried harder. "Dying isn't a whole lot of fun," he said, taking the tissues from her grasp and thus allowing her to regain her pose facing

him. “You feel rejected by life, ousted by the same force that continues to sustain those around you. You start to feel estranged, separated, rejected, but confined almost, as if you might contaminate the air that others breathe. It’s as if people are pushing you towards the exit, don’t want any more to do with you.”

“Edward, I didn’t mean to hurt you. I’m sorry. But there have been many things that have not been said over the years…”

“How would you know about ‘years’?” There was a new aggressive impatience in the voice. What he wanted to say was no longer in the words he chose, but in the manner in which he spoke them. “Frankly you know nothing about my relationship with my wife, you know nothing about how difficult a child your mother proved to be, just how much strain Penny was under…”

“But I do know that your response too often was to make yourself scarce. The history is not debatable.”

“I had a career. I had responsibilities… I was fixing bloody history myself!”

“And you liked eating Italian.”

There was a moment when Edward seemed ready to hit her. If he had mustered any strength, he probably would have. But, only seconds after the anger subsided, he announced, sounding both exhausted and defeated, “I’m tired,” and, for the first time visibly a broken man, he hobbled towards the door.

“Can I help?”

“Apparently not,” he said.

Edward receives an email

He had overslept that morning. It was eleven thirty before Edward Pitcairn opened his laptop, loaded his word processor and accessed the file of research notes from which he had gradually, slowly would be a better word, been extracting and ordering material. He was, item by item, point by point, inserting detail into a paper he was preparing for publication. He was still not happy with the title, “A comparison of human foot bone fragments from fossil remains on Sawu, Flores and Mindanao”, because the file retained evidence that this title had been edited each time he had opened the document. This particular morning, he paused on retrieving the document, swapped the names Mindanao and Sawu, and thus recreated the text in the same form as three days before. He had explained to Gemma the previous evening that the order was as critical as the message.

“If I put Sawu first, it makes it look like I am blowing my own trumpet.”

“You are, dad,” commented Gemma. Edward ignored her words.

“If I put Mindanao first, no one will read it……”

“…because it’s just a less well researched area…”

“Precisely. And if I put Flores first…” Edward Pitcairn had paused.

“It looks like you are being accommodating towards Sarnu.”

Edward nodded his agreement. “I can’t put it last because it might appear vindictive.”

Gemma smiled. “Perhaps you should ditch the idea and write a piece on fossilized detergent tablets.” At the time, she was loading the washing machine at the far end of the kitchen. They let the matter drop.

But when his thoughts returned to that late start of a morning, Edward Pitcairn, having recalled the discussion with his daughter, and having edited his title yet again, began to scroll through the entries in his file of notes.

“I wish I had brought a copy of the database,” he mumbled, ruing the fact that he had only copied the summary material from the desktop computer that lived beneath his desk in Yogyakarta. He had thought about contacting Fatima back at home in the apartment with a set of instructions of how to locate the file, zip it and send it, but he had rejected the idea. She was never any good with computers and the chances of her finding the right document he judged small, never mind the technical challenge of transforming it and attaching it to an email. Fatima, try as she might, could not get the idea of a hierarchical directory structure, having been brought up with information technology wholly in the age of the mobile phone app, which accessed recent data of relevance automatically. There were, of course, other reasons for his not having contacted his girlfriend, which were about to become explicit via actions that would not be his own.

As had become his habit, he was mumbling to himself as he read through his document. He commented on the hour, chided himself for

sleeping so late, tortured himself with the error of having taken a painkiller the night before, when, at two o'clock in the morning he found himself still unable to sleep. He could now find no comfort, no release from the pain which seemed to intensify only whenever he lay down. It seemed that the complaining internal organ only did so when gravity acted at ninety degrees to its usual axis. He had not experimented with the hundred and eighty degree shift, however, reminding himself that the last time he had stood on his head was in the gym approximately twenty years ago.

But that ninety degree shift seemed to bring the pain to life, if that was not an oxymoron. The minute he lay down it seemed to start. Whether it might have a physical cause, or whether it might be as a result of solitude refocusing his self-pity, he did not know. Generally, in the two weeks since he had procured the first of his painkiller prescriptions, he had avoided using the pills. He had correctly predicted, those weeks before, while talking to Khan, that they would make him sleep and thus force him to lose valuable time. But he also recalled saying to Gemma that if morphine were an option, then he would have it. He said out loud, "I wonder if this is it."

He drank from the tepid tea at his bedside. Gemma, as always, had put a mug by his bed, probably as much as two hours before, having first visited his room to check if he might be awake. It had become the new norm, if norm might be applied to a practice of less than a month. "Why," Edward asked her several times,

“do you bother to check if I am up? If I am asleep, you go downstairs, make me tea and then bring it up. If I am awake, note the difference, you go downstairs, make a tea and bring it up. Why not just bring me the tea?”

“Because if you are awake, I can say good morning dad,” had been Gemma’s reply, it’s quality of non sequitur eliciting neither comment nor qualification from either father or daughter.

There was a ping. It was a sharp little sonorous note that accomplished the interrupt it intended. An icon on the bottom left of Edward’s screen added a miniscule, coloured blob at its edge. He noticed immediately, probably seeing the change before he had heard the alarm, since, despite now feeling that he was surely close to death, his eyesight remained perfect and acute.

It was the icon that indicated mailbox activity. It regularly recorded new messages and these alarms, usually, he ignored, assuming they would emanate from the usual array of spammers, who ought to be hung, drawn, quartered, burned at the stake, dunked by ducking stool, gassed, hung, strangled, or even pulverized and used as fertilizer, depending randomly on the day of the week or the hour of receipt.

He would, no doubt, have received notice of closure of a non-existent bank account. He might have won fifty million dollars, several times. He might even have been mentioned in the will of someone he had never known and could become a millionaire just by clicking the link. There might even, possibly, be something worth reading.

But that particular morning, whether by virtue of some subliminal difference in the quality of the alarm, weather by virtue of the time of day, or, more likely, by virtue of a concordance in the mechanism of his own thoughts, he instinctively knew he must open the message. His mouse pointer hovered over the icon. Click. The email client took a moment to load. There were twenty new messages, most of them junk, but there was one he had been dreading, mailed from himself to himself, but not written by him. He opened it and read.

'Edward, kumusta mahal?

It has been a long time now. I do not hear from you. Please tell me your news. You are in London, far away from here. I am alone here, but I have some help. It is many weeks.

I am sorry.

I have done a thing you will not like.

My money is finished. Let me explain.

You were good. You gave me the card and the number. I was getting cash from the machines at the bank. I am doing exactly as you were saying. No problem. You say you will be away for two weeks. But now it is more than seven weeks, nearly eight. Please tell me the news of you. Did you see a doctor? What did he say? Are you still well?

The bills have come in. I paid the electricity and the rent. The bills are for May and June. The May bills were overdue when you left for London. I think you forgot to pay them when you were in hospital. And now I must pay the rent for July and there is no money. I went again to the cash point

and took a balance. The account is in the red. I cannot go into the bank to ask a question. The bank account is in your name only and it is very clear to everyone that my name is not Edward Pitcairn.

Yesterday, I saw some new clothes and tried to buy them. Maybe they were a bit expensive. But usually that is not a problem, is it, my love? Well, this time, because I had no cash, I used the card in the shop. The salesperson asked me to wait a moment because the machine was not connecting properly. It was only a few moments later that the manager came and told me to come to his office.

He told me he knew this was not my card. I tried to explain. But he said that his employees were within the law to ask to see a proof of identity for anyone using a credit card. He said it was illegal to use someone else's credit card without their written permission. Also, as you know, I am in trouble because I am not legal here. I have some papers where my name is Fatima, but the only official document I have is from the Philippines, where my name is Josie, of course. When you are here, it is no problem, but when you are away for so long, things start to go wrong.

The manager kept the card, and he called the bank. And now they have cancelled the card and blocked the account. So, I have no money. Edward, please tell me your news. It has been so long. I need to know. If you are away for more time, you know what I will have to do. I have no

choice. I am not legal here. I cannot work. Officially. You know.

I am sorry I went to the University to ask. I thought you might have sent a message. I went to your office, but I found the name on the door has changed. There is now a Bahasa name from the Public Policy department on the door. I spoke to the man. He said he has been in the office for a month and that your things have been put in store by the Personnel. I went there. They told me they have your files, your computer and your books. They are stored in boxes waiting for you to come back. They gave me a letter. I asked them why they did not send you the letter. They said they thought you were coming back. It was addressed to you, but they said I should open it. It was only in Bahasa. I have translated it using Google and copied the result. It says –

Dear Professor Edward Pitcairn

First of all, let me thank you for your years of devoted and professional service to the University, the Ministry of Culture, and the archaeological project on Sawu. Your contribution has been immense to the international reputation of the University and its work has benefited tremendously over the years as a result of your involvement.

It is with regret, however, that we must hereby inform you that the relationship between yourself and government agencies must now come to an immediate end. After consultation with Professor Sarnu and your doctors, we have concluded that the work on Sawu, which would be hard even for

a younger, fitter man, is now too difficult for you, and your returning there is no longer an option. We cannot put the health of a prominent academic like yourself at risk by requiring you to do field work on such a project. The insurance risk for the University of your collapse or injury on the site is now too great to bear. On this last occasion, when your ill health on site led to a collapse, we had to use emergency air services to bring you back to Java. The cost implications for the project of a recurrence of this event would put the whole study in financial jeopardy.

I must stress that this decision is in no way a criticism of yourself, or your work on Sawu. Throughout, you have conducted yourself in an exemplary manner and the quality of the academic study you have carried out is on a par with the very best in the world. There comes a time, however, when, in the best interest of all parties, someone like yourself should step back and accept that the time has come when such arduous activities can no longer be sustained. We wish you well in the future, but we inform you that your relationship with all government agencies in Indonesia is hereby terminated.

The last regular payment towards your ongoing costs was made at the beginning of May and no further payments will be made. This, of course, does not change or affect the relationship you retain with Hackney Metro University, nor does it change the status of your emeritus professorship with them. Furthermore, Professor Sarnu has stated without qualification that, if you want, all future research data will be shared with you so

you may continue to pursue your personal analysis of the material.

We appreciate and understand that these will be difficult times for you. The relationship between yourself, the University and the Sawu project has been exemplary. But there comes a time, in the interest of all parties involved, when such a relationship must be ended.

We wish you well and hope that your medical condition improves.

Yours, Sidono, Vice-chancellor

Edward, does this mean that there will be no more money coming into your account? If so, how can I live? I remember you saying how you used to transfer money from your London salary to here. Have you done that recently? Can you arrange a transfer?

Edward, I am worried. My father in the Philippines needs an operation. He needs a new hip. He is only sixty. That is too young to become an invalid. I need to send money for the operation. What can I do? Please send me a message. Can I do anything about the university letter?

We have been together for two years. I am grateful to you. I cannot thank you enough for giving me the chance to get away from that terrible life in the club. Life there can be dangerous. You have given me a chance in life. But without money, I have to go back. I have no choice. Please send me a message. I want to know about you. I don’t want to become Josie again. If I wear a scarf and call myself Fatima, I

can live. As Josie, shut up in the club, I am nothing. And there will be that terrible work… Please send me a message.

Love Josie.'

Edward Pitcairn left the message on the screen for several minutes. He obviously read the entire text several times. There was a lot to take in, but he made no discernible or audible comment, save for a grunt or two and a sigh.

What he did do, twenty minutes later, was access his online banking page on the YogyaBank website. He entered his personal identifier and password, which was his usual cipher of 'chupesi,,99' and spent several minutes checking the status of his account. He then went to the transfers page and began to instigate the regular pull transaction from his UK account, the details of which he had permanently stored on his YogyaBank records. He had completed the form and pressed the actuate button to transfer five hundred pounds from his UK account into Indonesian rupiah when the message, "Verify using the code sent to…" appeared on the screen, the mobile number completing the text being, of course, his Indonesian MudahComm, mobile.

There followed two minutes of frantic activity in Edward Pitcairn's room as he searched bags, surfaces and drawers for his recently untouched phone. He finally located it in the inside pocket of the jacket he had been wearing on the morning he arrived at Heathrow, almost three months before.

He switched on the phone, but it displayed a message to say its battery was dead. Another two

minutes of frantic activity were needed to locate its charger and lead, which was still in the same wheelie carry-on that had accompanied him on his flight. By this time, however, the screen prompt had expired and the transaction he had requested had been cancelled. He turned on the MudahComm phone anyway, now plugged into its power supply, and then set about repeating the instruction to the bank. He had the relevant page loaded again on his laptop when the phone, having rebooted and started, beeped. He turned to read the message. It was a further reminder that MudahComm regarded his status as ‘roaming’ and that extra charges would apply.

He thought for a moment. He paused for as long as a minute, still clicking and swiping back-and-forth between the laptop and mobile.

Then, with a deliberate, rather slow manner, he closed the phone and logged out of his YogyaBank account. He closed down the laptop and then slowly shuffled across to the bed, where he lay down, initially with a groan of pain. Just moments later. He was asleep.

Gemma and Elsie talk

Geoff Sullivan's mobile was on charge next to the hob that morning. He habitually used two phones, and one of them, it seemed to Gemma, was always on charge. In the kitchen, she would often mutter under her breath something about being a slave to technology, but she did always recognise his need to stay connected at all times, so she tolerated the trailing wire, the permanent use of the cooker's auxiliary socket and the space next to the hob which always seemed to be equally demanded by a hot pan. This particular morning, as usual, the charging phone had come to Gem's notice just after Geoff had left for work, just before she herself disappeared downstairs to her study. She had noted out loud with some irony that it, along with its owner, had become apparently by default almost permanent features of the Pitcairn household.

Elsie, who had got up late, had been lolling around the kitchen for an hour or more, making a smoothie for breakfast using yogurt, cucumber and raw peanuts, drinking almond milk and browsing her laptop. Her iPad was also beside her, tuned in to the morning news from a station her mother had probably never heard of and played at a level just below the audible. Beside the iPad, directly in front of her on the kitchen table, was her laptop, bought recently for her by her employer in recognition of her often needing access to her files on the move, such as when on location. Her retention of the expensive new item

was one of the sweeteners that Xenon media threw into the deal when they sacked her.

Her left hand switched between her two white-filled glasses, while the fingers of her right were permanently yet negotiably glued to her laptop's trackpad, the left occasionally crossing over to allow an extended little finger to press a key. She was engrossed with what she viewed, her drinks taken blind, the rolling news in chat format on the radio ignored. It was already after eleven and she was still not dressed, still residing somewhere within the extent of her batik caftan which, when ironed was regular and almost perfectly square, but when draped around the human form, seemed voluminous, unformed, even amorphous, yet ubiquitous, falling into folds reminiscent of a Renaissance painting's formal drapery, its highly patterned design confusing light and shade. She did not move when she heard footsteps coming up the stairs from the basement. Gemma turned the corner from the hall to enter the room at the rear of the house. She was panting a little.

"Morning, darling. Been up long?"

"Half an hour. I had things to do upstairs."

"I had things to do downstairs. It's time for a break. Fancy a cuppa?"

"No thanks," said Elsie, brandishing her still half full smoothie. "Still doing your lectures?"

Gemma shrugged, raising her eyes and brows to communicate, "Don't ask," when in fact that was precisely what she did not want to happen. She reached across Elsie's space to retrieve the kettle. Her daughter's chair backed onto the gas

hob where the kettle resided and was pushed slightly away from the table. It was just too close to allow easy access. Elsie did not attempt to move.

"How far have you got?"

"I'm about halfway through the course, I suppose."

"On course?"

Her mother laughed. "I'm certainly on the course, but I am definitely not on the schedule. I was hoping to be finished by now…"

"Parkinson's Law."

"Sod's Law, more like." Gemma filled the kettle from the large brass mixer tap that habitually leaked where the swan's neck armature connected at its base, replaced the kettle on the hob and lit the gas underneath with the snap of a flint igniter that she extracted noisily from the cutlery drawer.

"I can't believe we are still using an antique singing kettle."

"It works. It belonged to your grandmother."

Elsie turned around to look at the shining deep metallic red hemisphere with black handle and sprung spout closure as it began to rattle on the heat. There were numerous dents and scratches in the purity of its original mathematically pure shape through which lighter metal showed like scars, and a line of rust where the heavy base welded with the light top. "It would not look out of place in a museum, but it probably wouldn't be a design museum."

"They were fashionable in the sixties. The older ones used to whistle, but this one sounds a chord

like a harmonica. They were the height of sophistication back then. Dad says they used to sit and watch it heat up to get ready for the sound."

"Did they not have television?"

Gemma laughed. So did her daughter.

"The idea of the renowned Professor Edward Pitcairn and his teacher wife sitting at this table watching a kettle boil just to hear its two-tone alarm is both absurd and precious."

"It's about as absurd as your grandkids will find your having cucumber and yogurt smoothie for breakfast at half past eleven, dressed in an Indonesian batik." The comment could have indicated friction, but the tone kept clear of conflict, criticism or judgment. Gemma nodded at Elsie's laptop. "Anything interesting?"

"I just reread your black faces and Brexit piece."

"You're joking… Where on earth did you find that? I thought I had taken it down." There was more than mere impatience in her voice.

"I came across it a few days ago. Someone must have re-published it on a different site and it seems to be in the public domain. Look…"

Elsie invoked a search engine and entered a few words into the box before hitting a return with a definite slap.

Gemma watched as the results from the query 'gemma pitcairn black brexit' listed. "Jesus… There are pages of hits… Are they all my text?"

"I've looked at the first page of results – there are at least three pages of hits, by the way - and every one I have seen carries the full text. The

user comments are a bit tasty… You seem to have been praised and condemned by both right and left in the same measure."

"And I bet the praise is from people I would not praise myself and the criticism is from people who think like me. Talk about shooting yourself in the foot… I didn't realize that it was still around… I thought…"

"Mum, the Internet is permanent. Anything you publish, anything captured is forever."

"Fossilized would be the word. Edward will be excavating it next." Gemma's comment was almost in passing while she reached across her daughter to scroll down the display.

"But these fossils keep changing. I've even found a copy of your article on an evangelical site aimed at converting Chinese people to become followers of an American Bible Belt church. It has whole phrases changed, but it's still recognizably in the same piece. And it still has your name at the end, complete with a link back to the original on a free article site, even though the text they have published has been changed, sometimes to complete gobbledygook."

"You're joking!" The reaction was now visceral.

Elsie typed again, dragged her fingers across the touchpad and clicked. "Here. Look."

Gemma Pitcairn, disinterested at first, glanced at the screen but, as seconds passed to minutes, found herself engrossed in this apparent copy of her own work which was not actually a copy, nor an edit, but an apparently randomly amended version of her text. "They've even kept my name at the end. And the edits don't even seem to make

sense… Why? Why would anyone bother? That is plagiarism. They don't even seem to have edited this in a coherent way…" There was real anger in her voice. She continued to read, thoroughly engrossed. "This is disgraceful!"

"The only thing I could think of," said Elsie, pushing back her chair towards the hob to allow her mother more space, "was that they are using your text to send clandestine messages to their supporters in China."

"But it's nonsense… Is it in a code of some sort?" Gemma looked up. "Darling, do be careful. The hob is on. Your dress is too close."

Elsie dragged her chair to the side without getting up. "No. They don't need a code. The message they want to send will be short and embedded in one or two of the phrases they have inserted, most of which are, as you say, gobbledegook. In a separate message, they send a couple of numbers to their contact. These are the line numbers of the text to be used. The contact downloads the document, strips out everything apart from those line numbers…"

"…and there's the message…"

"Absolutely not! Anyone could read it if the text was included verbatim. What happens is that they then compare the same lines from your original text with the extract and then run something like an exclusive-or word for word. That will remove all your original text, leaving a set of words, which then assembled in a predetermined order will carry the message. To work, they have to use words which are not in your text."

Gemma was still reading. “Such as excommunicate? Or Creator’s Church? Or rapture?”

“Most of what they have inserted will be nonsense. The message will be four or five words, that’s all.”

“It seems so crude, so easy to detect.”

“It is crude. But each character to be checked is one byte and given that there’s two times ten to the power eighteen characters of new data added to the internet every day, it is an enormous task even to try to identify the message. And, frankly, unless someone had also intercepted the message with the line numbers to be used, it would be impossible. The result would not be declared this century, at least, even with supercomputers working on it full time. And why would anyone bother? They are only Evangelical Christians., after all.” Elsie was no mathematician, but the more technical workings of the Internet had been part of her training.

Gemma was still reading her article on Elsie’s screen. She leaned further across her daughter to access the built-in mouse so she could scroll down the document. Inadvertently, the pointer hovered above a minimized word processor icon at the bottom right of the screen and the documents name displayed. She looked at Elsie and said, “Have you been studying that?”

Elsie shrugged. The kettle started to sing.

“I sent it to you because you were mentioned. You might need…”

It was a while before Elsie responded. Gemma’s kettle continued its singing boil until

she lifted it off the gas, its drone fading to a reedy croak. She filled the ready tea-bagged I Love New York mug with hot water and replaced the kettle on the hob, without turning off the gas. The kettle rang out loud again before Gemma reached across to turn the hob's control and the metal dome quietened. "I can't relate to it, said Elsie. "It's not as if I really know him. I have hardly seen anything of him over the years… But it's hard to accept that in a few weeks, perhaps a day or two, he won't be here anymore. He will be in the ground somewhere."

"Cremated, actually. Scattered."

"But where?"

"Islington crem. It's up in Finchley, just by the North Circular."

"Have you booked him in?"

Gemma paused, longer than would be needed to punctuate conversation. She was making a point. "Elsie, I don't have a date…"

"Of course. I'm already thinking of him in the past tense." Elsie's experience was clearly wandering over new, previously untrodden ground.

"That was the present. Sorry. Elsie… Did you want some tea, coffee?"

"No. I have this," she said lifting her glass with its white streaked interior. Gemma winced slightly at the sight. "I wasn't expecting him to be worth… To be worth quite so much…"

"There'll be death duties. Inheritance tax on his estate. We get 325K tax free and an extra 175K if we inherit the house. And half the value of the house is already mine. There's a sliding

scale in his case, because he's worth more than two million."

"It sounds like you have done your homework."

Gemma shrugged. "He did all the work. He went through everything with me down to the last detail. There's another document that he prepared with all the procedures outlined, but I didn't send that to you. There's no point duplicating effort, especially since none of it applies until he… until he is… but the general information had to be shared. It sounds a lot. But by the time we have paid the tax, funeral and the rest of the costs, it will not look so rosy. By the way, I intend to put a codicil on his will to give you half the house."

"Serious?"

"He did that for me when mom died. It seems only right. And that way I will still own the same amount I have now. Things will be simpler if I were to…"

The kettle again announced its intention to sing. Gemma turned around to check the gas control and found that it was not quite completely off. It clicked this time and the kettle lulled again.

Elsie studied her mother for a while. Gemma was ready to cry. She had been on the verge of tears for a minute or more, holding the hot mug close to her stomach with two hands, still full to the brim with the tea that she had thus far ignored. Mother and daughter embraced, the mug hurriedly placed on the table, and spilling its tea. Elsie, the childless granddaughter automatically assumed the role of consoling mother. Try as she might, Elsie could not cry, but

it was only confusion, perhaps naivete that kept her silent. It was several minutes before she broke the new silence they shared. “It’s been so sudden.”

“Not really, Elsie. I knew he was ill. I knew it from last year. None of us lasts forever. He wrote me a couple of letters, and I also heard from people at work, people he wrote to about the dig. He was ill, took a rest, went back to the site, got ill again, took another rest… That took us from the end of last year to March. And then he had his collapse. He stayed on Sawu, and then spent time in hospital under observation. It was only then that they ran all the tests. Apparently, they were worried he might have sustained a head injury from his fall. So, they waited. Kept him under observation. Then they did the tests. But that took him up to the time for his annual leave and the results weren’t ready, so he set off. And here we are. He got the results only after he got home.”

“None of us lives forever…” Elsie looked at her mother, but her gaze was searching her own thoughts. “Some of us should make a start…” Elsie paused to look again at the document on the screen. “Half of this,” she said, casting for a glance around to indicate this brick pile of Islington future. “I don’t even know if I’ll be living in London when…”

“When you find a job?”

“If anyone will have me.”

“They will. I almost lost my job over that stupid article… It went all the way to the vice-

chancellor. In retrospect, I probably only held on because they didn't want to offend my dad."

"You were a bit strong. And I don't really know why you trawled up that stuff from the past."

"Not a nice thing to say to the daughter of an archaeologist. I got hauled over the coals big time. I was told I had dragged the university's name through the gutter, attracted adverse publicity, and all that shit."

"Like daughter like mother."

"And it was all his idea," said Gemma, nodding towards Geoff Sullivan's mobile, on charge next to the gas hob.

Mother and daughter shared a moment of silence as they jointly contemplated the continued and current presence of this man in the room. "Do you think he's listening in to us right now?"

"What through his phone?" asked Gemma. "It's turned off."

"It's still on charge."

"You must know more about these things than I do, but I would have thought that it had to be switched on to operate."

Elsie shrugged. "So, it was Geoff who put you up to it?"

"No, not at all. They were all my ideas. But he did encourage me to write them down and then publish, and, if I remember correctly, it was specifically Geoff who suggested I make it available to all via an Internet article site."

"He's definitely not been straight with me on Uking Palace. We know something about the way he works now. We have dribbled a couple of

stories his way recently, false leads, and found them boomeranging back to us."

"What? Are you still convinced that he's not straight?"

Elsie nodded. She was consciously using silence to emphasize her comment. "I know he's not straight."

Gemma looked at Elsie, newly serious. "That little ploy you suggested a week ago… Did you pursue it?"

Elsie reached across and took her mother's hand. "I was waiting to tell you. I thought you seemed frail and kept quiet. Mom, I did as we agreed."

Gemma was silent but concentrating.

"He took the bait. No hesitation whatsoever."

"And so…"

"Indeed," said Elsie. "He went off to work as normal. You left the house as we agreed and a quarter of an hour later, he was back."

"And you went through with it?"

"Of course I did! He would have been alerted we were onto him if I had done anything else." There was a question in Gemma's eyes. "With a condom, of course."

"So, he is a shit."

"I think we already knew that mom. Let's now say he is a complete shit."

Gemma retrieved her I Love New York mug from the table, which had been sitting in a pool of its own slops. She reached across to the sink, took a cloth, wrung it out and mopped up the spill in a way that suggested that thought was not needed in the process, but that a little aggression

might help. She similarly took an over large gulp of her tea, which was still too hot. She coughed a little and wiped her mouth on the back of her hand. “I don’t know… I’ll have to think through what to do next. It must be something to do with me. I seem to attract disingenuous shit bags of men.”

“Is there any other type?”

“Your grandad…”

For a moment they shared a silent concentrated gaze that resulted in an unspoken agreement not to pursue the matter further. It was Gemma who continued. “I’ve known there was something wrong for some time…”

“But you did nothing…”

“He was fun to be with sometimes.”

Elsie smiled. “Like wearing a blindfold to a silent film?”

“There’s always the live piano.”

“Like a deaf person blindfolded at a silent movie.”

Gemma laughed. In the case of Geoff Sullivan, whom she had claimed in the past she never trusted, there simply wasn’t the level of emotional involvement on her part to cause pain. In a way, she looked vaguely satisfied, vindicated, having eventually been proved right, now the new victor in battle, though for some years she had been losing the war. She was, nevertheless, angry, frustrated, taken for granted, taken for a sucker.

“So, what next? Do we kick him out?”

Elsie shook her head. “Not yet.”

“Not yet… You mean I have to keep sharing my bed with a bloke who has fucked my daughter? It’s all getting rather Greek… All I want to do is avoid the tragedy. Why wait?”

Elsie finished her smoothie with a smack of the lips and the hint of a chew on the solid remnants from the bottom of the glass. It was a gesture calculated to convey a sense of confidence, an impression of her being in control of the situation that both women now clearly believed had got out of hand. “Two weeks ago, I came to you with an idea.”

“You certainly did, darling. Fancy a walk down off the street mom? And we haven’t even reached Highbury and Is before you told me you were going to screw my bloke. It’s not an everyday mother-daughter scenario, darling, let’s face it! But then I said to myself, there’s something in this. Let’s let him prove himself, I thought.”

“This is getting medieval, a bit like trial by ordeal…”

“Except that experience usually offered a choice between equally unacceptable options. In our case, it’s the two of us who have been on trial.”

“And he has tried us both.” Elsie smiled an ironic smile. “What interests me, mom, is the fact that it took you all these years to realize…”

“Oh, come on, Elsie… It’s been two years since he’s been a regular, and the regularity has never become established... I accept there were occasions before that…”

“All the way back to the Brexit referendum. That’s five years ago.”

“He is good in bed, I suppose.”

Elsie stared back. “No comment.” The two women burst into loud laughter prompted by a shared, unstated and immediately understood sense of the ridiculous.

“There’s nothing like priorities when it comes to political judgment.” Gemma was still laughing when she continued. “There was a time, Elsie, when I would have been devastated that I had been lied to, taken for granted, used and abused. Now, it’s almost as if I don’t care. It’s almost as if I am relieved that I know he’s been lying to me. I was beginning to think it was my problem.”

“And that is the reason why we should string him along a bit longer.” Elsie paused, drawing her feet up onto her chair and grasping her arms around her folded legs. “Are you sure you don’t mind?”

“Mind? Of course I mind!” Gemma was shouting, but also smiling.

“Careful! Your dad will hear.”

“He’s out. ‘I’m going out for a walk,’ he said. ‘I’ll be away before nine.’ And so, he is out somewhere, terminally ill, ready to…”

“Why didn’t you stop him? Put your foot down. Tell him he needs to stay in…”

“Elsie, have you ever tried to ‘tell’ Edward Pitcairn anything? And anyway, what do you say to a dying man? How about, stay in because it’s safer?”

Elise thought for a moment. “I take your point.”

Gemma continued. “He could be absolutely anywhere. He went out a couple of days ago as well, but he didn’t stay out for long. For a week

or two after his diagnosis, he was still going for walks, but now he seems just to go round the corner and down to the station. He sits on a bench along Compton Terrace and watches the world go by, he says. He takes his notebook, of course, and he's got my old phone, but if there's a problem, he won't be able to answer a call, will he? I'm dreading the phone call. 'Gemma Pitcairn, we have just found your father…' I was really reluctant to let him go. But what could I do?" The stress was on the 'I'. "He's in pain now. I know it. He has taken painkillers in the last few days. I even found him asleep in the middle of the day yesterday, lying on his bed, with his laptop still powered up beside him. There was a strip of pills on the bedside table, so I took a look. I think he's walking to the chemist, but not telling us."

Elsie looked at her mother. It was clear that Gemma thought her daughter would comment about her grandfather. She did, but not in the way that Gemma anticipated. "Anyway, as far as the Geoff thing goes, he knows already." The mother's face asked a shocked question.

"He heard us, Geoff and me. He had a go at me the other morning."

Gemma's shake of the head described a situation that was now beyond control.

"But we do have to string him along… Are you sure you don't mind?"

Gemma readopted her raised voice. "Do I mind? Damn well sure I mind! Damn well sure I feel utterly pissed off!"

"And hence we have to get even."

“Bleasdale.” Gemma’s non sequitur was immediate, a reflex.

“What?”

Gemma nodded. “You wouldn’t know, darling. Before your time. Back in the darkest days of Thatcher’s eighties. Boys From The Black Stuff was a television play about recession and unemployment in Liverpool. It was one of the great lines. A character called Chrissy, in bed says to his long-suffering wife, ‘My dad used to say don’t get mad, get even. Now I can’t even get mad.’ I should now amend my own version. ‘Now even I am mad.’ Edward and Penny recorded the plays – it was a series – on their state-of-the-art video cassette machine and they used to replay it at least once a week. For them, it was like going to church. That’s why I remember it so well.”

“So, because you’re mad, we get even.” Gemma and Elsie both smiled.

“How, darling?” Gemma’s voice betrayed commitment to the strategy, but complete lack of confidence in the tactic, whatever it might be. “When it comes to Mr. Sullivan, we know we are dealing with a liar, an opportunist, a freeloader…”

“But he is possibly also a professional,” said Elsie. Gemma looked confused. Her silent question prompted her daughter to continue. “I told you earlier that we had fed him with false information.”

“And that it had come back to you.”

“It did, but not directly. We had a meeting, the usual people. What we normally do is agree our position and then we publicize via social media.

But what we don't want is for everyone to go potty and put their own versions on the net. We are a bit more organized than that. So, what we do is agree time, date, focus and language. Our committee actually agrees the wording, drafts the message and designs any graphics to go with it."

"Sounds like hours of work."

"Mum, we are campaigners, not academics. We can actually get things done without conferences, hundreds of references and lots of talk."

"Yes dear."

Elsie smiled, condescendingly, licked the index finger of the left-hand and drew it through thin air to indicate a score of one being chalked up on her account. "But having agreed on the message, always in very simple language, with recognizable graphics…"

"It sounds like a Covid briefing."

"The Tories employ professionals, mom."

"Professionals like you."

"Indeed. Once upon a time." There was a hint of both regret of the past and fear of the future in her voice. "There's no point in inviting people to discuss, to contribute, especially to differ. It's not the modern way."

"Dictatorial tactics, punched home by the lowest common denominator."

"It works. Just ask the Labour Party."

"You would get a different answer from every person you asked. That's democracy."

"That's losing. And that's my point. Simplify. Then amplify." Elsie looked across at her mother, who was finishing her mug of tea with complete concentration. "So, we had agreed a message,

text and the rest and it was handed over to me to launch it on Facebook, Twitter, the website, the blog, Instagram and the rest, all exactly the same style with the same message."

"So, what happened?"

"Nothing."

"I wish I understood."

"At our committee meeting, with Geoff Sullivan not present, we did our usual thing, but we all agreed beforehand to leave all our laptops, mobile phones, tablets and the rest outside the room. We agreed that there would be a demo, just a little one, twenty people with banners, placards and the like. And we said we should invite the press. It was to be outside Hackney Town Hall on the Saturday at the end of June."

"I don't remember you…"

"Of course, you don't remember my going to a demo at the end of June. It didn't happen. That was the point. We agreed it would be a spoof arrangement. I didn't publicize it. We had agreed. But what I did was prepare the minutes of the meeting, as normal on the day after and describe in detail all the arrangements we had decided. I then sent the minutes out, just like normal. We use a list, a contact list, including all the people we think should know, including journalists, including media people and the rest. Everyone knows that the details of our direct action will appear on Facebook and the rest of social media. So, all the message contains are the minutes of the meeting and details when people should look on Facebook to get the final instructions."

"I still don't understand. It's not clear."

“Well, Geoff Sullivan, of course, he’s on the contact list, but not on the committee. He received the minutes which described a planned protest on that Saturday morning at ten o’clock. That’s what we discussed in the meeting and that’s what I sent out and he got the message.”

“But you didn’t send out any of the usual publicity, is that it?”

“Exactly. The committee meeting was the week before. I send the minutes immediately afterwards, but normally the publicity goes out just two or three days in advance. It’s our way of minimising the chance of the opposition organising something to undermine us.”

“And this time you never put anything on the social media sites.”

“Precisely.”

“And?”

“The counter demonstration turned up.”

Gemma was rendered speechless. It took her a while to absorb the significance. Elsie let her realize for herself before continuing.

“There were young Tories. White supremacists. Neo-fascists. Self-publicists. The usual crew. But only about twenty of them. We had people watching. They turned up, made some noise, did their chanting. Then, after about ten minutes we saw a couple of the organizers - it was very clear who they were - get on their mobile phones to someone or other. They were expecting to see an Off Uking Palace demo doing its thing and, of course, they were there alone. They were becoming confused because we weren’t there.”

“Because you had not publicized the demo.”

“Precisely.”

Gemma was still unsure. There were still questions. “How do you know that it was Geoff who passed on the information?”

“Our committee, when we made the decision, was just three people. I am completely confident that they are straight and honest. We havebeen together since the start of the campaign.”

“But you sent the minutes out to your contact list…”

“In theory. Geoff received his copy as normal. But I always send those messages in the same way. I send it addressed to myself, and a blind copy to everyone else on the list, about twenty addresses. But this time, I blind copied only to Geoff.”

“So, he thought he had received the usual type of message. And couldn’t tell he was the only one.”

“Precisely.”

“And in fact, he was the only one who received the message. So, it must have been Geoff who leaked the information.”

“Precisely. There was even a little report in the early editions of the local online newspaper, which was up on the site on the Saturday morning, saying that there would be a protest outside the Town Hall. They realized their mistake soon after mid-morning, because the demonstration never happened, and they updated the site to cut the story.”

“How did journalists normally get the information on your activities?”

“Well, we assumed that they read the same social media announcements that everyone else did, after being forewarned, of course, that the messages would appear. If they were on our contact list, they had obviously received notice that the information would be appearing a few days earlier in the minutes of the meeting. At least that’s what we assumed in the past.”

“Except in this case there weren’t any announcements.”

“No.”

“So, it must have been Geoff.”

“Absolutely. And he alerted his contacts after receiving details of the meeting so they could organise. There’s no doubt.”

Gemma stood and took her now empty mug to the sink, where she rinsed it, wiped around the inside with a cloth and then set it down to drain on the plate rack. She dried her hands on the towel that habitually hung folded from the horizontal oven door handle. “Well. I suppose that’s that. No more Geoff Sullivan for me.”

“Mum, that’s exactly what we don’t want you to do. What we need to do is carry on as normal. I will offer him some more bait.”

Gemma looked shocked. “You’re going to sleep with him again? After all this? Feel free. You won’t catch him near me.”

“Absolutely not. Of course, I’m not going to sleep with him again. But I am going to offer him the bait. Let’s do it the same way as before. You tell him you have a meeting at work, so he knows you’re going to be out of the house. I’ll give him the come on just like before.”

Gemma interrupted, looking her daughter directly in the eye. “You really are a very beautiful young woman, you know.”

“I have noticed, Mum! I know how to control certain… activities. Or transactions... I get him to, let’s say, cooperate, just like before. And, at the right moment, when I give you the signal, I’ll say something like ‘Come on’ quite loudly, you come into my room and take a photo of him naked. You throw a tantrum and say you’re going to publish it on the Internet and then we both insist he tells us the full story.”

Gemma spent some moments staring at her daughter. Her expression might have communicated disbelief, but it was clear to both of them that they were way beyond the stage of being surprised by anything. “I suppose you do work in the creative industries… Do you think we will learn anything?”

“It’s worth a try. What else can we do? If we just kick him out, we have learned nothing that will be of use to ourselves or to others. Will you do it?”

“I’ll do it, but I don’t think it will work. At least we will make it clear to him that we have sussed him out.”

Gemma did not immediately respond. She looked across to the gas hob and said, “And what if he is recording all of this? What if he knows what we are planning?”

“Then he won’t take the bait, will he?”

Mother and daughter reacted instinctively to the noise. The front door opened, causing its sprung closure to squeak a loud shriek. “It needs

oiling again," said Gemma as she leaned forward across the table to open her view of the entrance hall. "It's only Edward, back from his walk. I'll go and see if he needs anything."

She was already on her way out of the room when Elsie called out, "Mom, not a word, okay?"

Gemma paused and nodded. The stairs were already creaking as her father began his ponderous trek to the top floor without greeting her.

Islington tragedy: Academic's family dies in drug overdose – police investigate

Edward Pitcairn, professor of archaeology in Hackney Metro University, was found dead on the steps of the family house last Tuesday evening. His body was badly mutilated after his mobile phone battery caught fire. The body was discovered by a neighbour out walking at around nine thirty. The neighbour, unfortunately, did not immediately notify the emergency services, believing that he himself could intervene. His efforts proved fruitless, and another neighbour eventually called the police and fire brigade after an unnecessary delay of around ten minutes. The police are investigating whether the delay may have contributed to the seriousness of the incident.

Edward Pitcairn's family, daughter Gemma, 50, and his granddaughter Elsie, 26, were also discovered dead inside the house, having succumbed to an overdose of the recreational drug, fentanyl. A third victim inside the house, a male in his forties has not yet been officially named, but it is assumed that he was Mr. Geoff Sullivan, the live-in boyfriend of Gemma Pitcairn.

Emergency service personnel report that they were called to an address near Highbury Fields, Islington, at around a quarter to ten. They arrived to find Edward Pitcairn dead on the steps outside the house's front door. Pitcairn's mobile phone appeared to have ignited while he was trying to escape from the house. His body was badly burned, but the identification was definite.

It appears that there had been domestic differences surrounding Gemma Pitcairn's relationship with her boyfriend, Mr. Sullivan. It appears that Edward Pitcairn may have administered the drug to his daughter, her lover and granddaughter in a fit of pique. His judgment may have been at fault as a result of his own terminal condition. He was suffering from a pancreatic cancer, a condition that was predicted to end his own life in the near future. Oncologist Dr. Julius Stringer, who spoke to us having been told of these events, said, "It is not uncommon that a patient with a terminal illness suddenly and irrationally becomes vindictive and tries to take family members with him. It is a condition that we call terminal agitation and can result in the terminally ill patient resorting to uncharacteristic behaviour, including anger or aggression. It is possible that in this case, the patient vented that uncontrolled anger towards his family members."

It is alleged that Professor Pitcairn, a well-known left-wing academic, apparently poisoned his family members and then tried to escape. His mobile phone apparently developed a fault as he left the house and its battery ignited. The flames were what alerted the neighbours, who raised the alarm. Emergency personnel at the scene also reported that there was a smell of gas inside the house.

Professor Edward Pitcairn, 73, was an accomplished archaeologist. His daughter, Gemma, 50, was a noted left-wing academic, specialising in Media Studies and taught at

Hackney Metro University, the same institution where her father had held a Professorship for forty years. Edward Pitcairn's granddaughter, Elsie, 26, was previously employed in film and television production, but had recently lost her job. In recent years, she had become an environmental campaigner and was involved with organising the demonstration that led to the Hackney-Stratford riots last month. Elsie Pitcairn, as reported in this newspaper, was arrested at that event for antisocial behaviour towards the police, her eventual charge being resisting arrest. The case against her was pending at the time of the family incident in which she, her mother, her mother's boyfriend and her grandfather lost their lives.

Elsie Pitcairn's campaign was actively opposing the construction of Uking Palace, a residential development in east London, a project being undertaken by an Indonesian company, partly owned by Edward Pitcairn's professional colleague, Dr. Onggo Sarnu. Police are currently investigating whether this was the source of a major family argument that went tragically wrong.

One as yet unproved interpretation is that Edward Pitcairn had become so ashamed of his granddaughter's notoriety and apparent professional failure that he became unbalanced, believing that his family were in danger of destroying his own name and legacy. Both Gemma and Elsie Pitcairn were known to be recreational drug users. One former colleague of Edward Pitcairn's granddaughter told us that

recreational fentanyl use amongst media professionals is widespread.

The coroner is yet to report an official cause of death.

The long read: what happened at the Pitcairn house?

An analysis by Julia Krieg and Anand Chakra

It is now two weeks since tragedy struck the Pitcairn household in the family home just off Holloway Road in North London. We are told by police that, since the matter is still under investigation, speculation about what might have happened might prejudice the outcome of enquiries. Though we accept the validity of the position, we believe that there remain many questions to be asked, questions whose answers might contribute significantly to the outcome. There are issues that need to be raised in public simply to ensure that they are indeed addressed by any enquiry into these tragic events. A journalistic silence about what might have happened to the Pitcairns can only assist those parties that still have an interest in glossing over some crucial considerations that certainly influenced what happened, considerations that are in danger of being dismissed by others who seem to have an interest in opting for simplistic, but demonstrably wrong interpretations. It is our intention to ensure that all issues are addressed. It is our intention to refute what we see as baseless, interest-driven interpretations that have already been published in the popular press.

Though the outcome is not disputed, a description of what was reported by passers-by and neighbours two weeks ago must form the starting point of our analysis. We intend to

assemble the evidence in detail before we offer our interpretation, a process that is the direct reverse, it seems, of that which has been applied to previous versions of events.

It was around half past nine in the evening when Jaswant Singh, a resident of the area was walking north along Crane Grove. He recalls that it was a particularly quiet evening. “We had been told to stay at home for some weeks, and, though the restrictions were on the point of being lifted, very few people were venturing out. It is a straight road and, though it was not quite dark, the streetlights were already on. I had a perfect view of the road ahead, all the way to the junction at the top. It was spitting with rain, but the visibility was fine. There was no one in view. There was no movement at all. There was no one in sight.”

This first part of Jaswant Singh’s eyewitness account of events appears to be merely anodyne scene setting. But embedded within it is a crucial point that contradicts other public speculation from various sources. This eyewitness account reports no activity along the street. Numerous other published reports have completely ignored this detail, the fact that effectively belies the widely publicized accounts that circulated immediately after the event. Mr. Singh’s evidence directly refutes the basis of these accounts, indeed renders them completely fictitious. There was no evidence of movement, of disturbance or even a closing door along that street before the flames appeared. Other accounts have described Edward Pitcairn leaving the house, falling by the

gate to the street and then his mobile phone battery immediately bursting into flames. No one in fact saw this. It is fabrication.

Here is Jaswant Singh again. “I was walking north along that street. It was completely quiet and then, in the distance, I saw flames. On the right, in the front garden of the last house, there was suddenly a single flash and then strong red flames, so strong that I could see them from fifty metres away. I knew immediately that this was serious.”

This, again apparently passing comment, contains a detail that has been consistently and conveniently overlooked. The flames are specifically recalled as red from their inception, a fact that might indicate the presence of lithium. The fire clearly started in a mobile phone battery. It was not true, as reported in previous articles, that the fire started as Edward Pitcairn fell, but it is true that the phone’s destruction caused the fire. It was not the fire that damaged the phone. It was the phone that caused the fire. In addition, and directly contradicting previous reports, Edward Pitcairn was already prostrate on the steps by the front door and motionless before the flames appeared.

Jaswant Singh again. “I started to run up the road, because in the fading light the flames were very bright. When I reached the house, I could see through the gate the shape of a human being outlined in the light. But the person was not moving. Of that I am absolutely sure. He was just lying there on the ground. I could see the silhouette against the flames. I suppose it took

me ten seconds or so to realise what I was seeing. And as soon as I was sure there was a body lying on the ground and that it was on fire, I tried to open the gate."

Again, we have crucial detail here. The eyewitness account describes a visible human form. Jaswant Singh does not describe someone falling, or someone standing. In fact, he specifically, though later, qualified his account by stating that the human being was already prostrate at the base of the entrance steps that lead up to the house from the door. The fact that he added this detail to his story some three days after the event has called his entire account into question. It is our assertion, however, that this detail is entirely consistent with his reporting of a lack of movement along the street at the beginning of his testimony, a detail that was recorded in the statement he gave to police just a couple of hours after the event.

Jaswant Singh again. "There was this guy, lying at the bottom of the steps. He was on fire. Not just a little. There were flames coming up from his body, red flames rising a metre above him. By then his clothes were already on fire as well. The smell was terrible. I tried the gate, but it was locked. I did not try to call out to him. It was obvious that he was already beyond help."

There followed a hiatus of a minute or more. The front gate of the property was locked. It is made of barred metal and opens directly onto the street. It is quite short, just a metre or so in height. It does, however, have a row of long sharp spikes across the top. A younger man might have

climbed the gate, placed his foot on the top rail between the spikes and then jumped over. Jaswant Singh, however, is in his early sixties and, to be frank, is rather well-built. Climbing over the gate was not an option for him but he did try to do so, and the time it took could have proved crucial if there had been a chance of saving any of the victims. In this case, however, the delay probably changed nothing. The attacks against Mr. Singh on social media, claiming he dithered while people died, are thus totally without foundation.

Neither could he climb over the wall. The boundary wall of the Pitcairn house extends the full width of the house's street frontage and is a metre and a half high. Jaswant Singh recalls, "I did try to climb up the wall, but there were no handholds and anyway I find it hard to support my weight. I did not know what to do. I had already pressed the bell by the gate several times and now I just kept my finger on it. It was still quiet in the street, and I could hear the bell ringing inside the house. I pressed again and again but there was no response. I tried shouting at the house in case there was someone in an upstairs room who might hear."

We estimate that, as described, these failed attempts at alerting the house's inhabitants might have taken a minute or two. A minute is about as long as a mobile phone battery takes to burn out. It has to be recorded that Jaswant Singh at no point heard a scream, a shout or any distress call from the man on the steps. For upwards of two minutes, he had been on fire,

motionless and silent. Mr. Singh then rang the doorbells of neighbouring houses, one of whom immediately called the emergency services. A published account even accuses Mr. Singh of negligence because he had not already called the police or the fire services himself at this stage. The reporter concerned neither spoke to Mr. Singh nor even tried to contact him and thus never appreciated that he was not carrying a telephone.

A police car arrived on the scene approximately nine minutes later, a fire truck three minutes after that. The police officers were still in the process of forcing the gate when the fire truck arrived. Now almost fifteen minutes have elapsed since Jaswant Singh first noticed the flames, which by now had burned out leaving Edward Pitcairn's still smouldering body on the steps.

The scene that greeted the emergency personnel was gruesome. The lithium flame had by then completely burnt out, so there was no evidence of red about the flames which still showed around the body, now only fuelled by remnants of the victim's clothing. Where the mobile phone had been, grasped to the midriff area, there was a charred mass of flesh and bone, the lithium fire having burned almost through the body in the area of stomach and groin.

Within a minute, of course, the fire was doused. They used water. This again is an important detail because, if there had been any lithium metal remaining from the phone's battery, adding water would have simply

reignited the fire. The fact that it did not proves that the lithium fire was already spent, hence the degree of mutilation that had resulted.

The police forced the gate and immediately tried the front door. Since the house is an end of terrace, some officers, according to their training, also sought entry at the back. The layout of the house, however, did not give these officers any direct clue as to what had happened inside. The other victims, of course, were all in the kitchen, which, when standing at the rear of the house, is actually one floor up, since access to the back garden is from what at the front of the house is a basement. Again, potentially vital minutes were spent forcing the front door, which proved to be a very sturdy, hard wood door set in a hard wood frame. Police officers also forced the patio doors in the back, which were of the modern, double glazed, aluminium frame type and were multiple locked, having themselves been installed just two years before, according to the express wish of Gemma Pitcairn, for their extra security. We estimate that it was a further three minutes before the fire brigade officers succeeded in jemmying the front door free of its locks.

Both police officers and firemen reported immediately smelling gas upon entering the house. And thus, we reach another anomaly that has thus far been completely ignored by the shabby reporting of the story elsewhere. This was not simply, ‘There was a smell of gas in the house’ that a well-known populist newspaper reported the day after the incident. In fact, there

was so much gas that both the police and firemen, who had entered by the front door, turned back, believing they would need breathing equipment. They were also worried that the air in the house would even be explosive. It was five minutes later that a single member of the fire service, wearing breathing equipment, entered the hallway. By that time, the police had managed to force open the patio doors downstairs, so there was a draught through the house which soon flushed out the majority of the escaped gas. The quote about there being merely ‘a smell of gas’ came from a police officer who did not even enter the premises for a further fifteen minutes, by which time it was possible to breathe inside without assistance.

The fire crew assumed correctly that the gas was coming from the kitchen. A single fireman with breathing equipment made his way straight to the back of the house. For those entering via the front, an open door at the end of the internal corridor would have immediately identified the room at the rear as the kitchen. This would have been obvious, even from as far away as the front entrance. The fireman immediately approached the gas hob, assuming the leak must have originated from there. Previous reports falsely recorded that the officer turned off the gas. Now we have contacted the officer concerned who has spoken to us off the record, and we will not reveal his identity here in order to preserve his anonymity. He confirmed that he did check the gas hob before doing anything else and that all the controls were in the ‘off’ position. If the

matter were to go to an enquiry, the officer concerned has assured us that he will testify and that he will confirm the version of events he told us.

Having discovered that the kitchen hob's controls were all off, he checked the oven, which was obviously electric. He then assumed the leak must have come from a gas boiler, and so the officer tried to locate it. Meanwhile police officers entering the basement, unknown to the fireman above, had already located the gas boiler in the utility room at the front of the house. The boiler was not leaking gas and was of a modern type, so it was not even burning a pilot light. It is worth noting at this point that the police officers who entered the basement had done so without the need for breathing equipment. They reported the smell of gas, but clearly it was not at the concentrations perceived by those who had entered the house by the front door. There was still the possibility that gas was leaking from the main but, once the windows and the door were opened, the smell of gas started to subside. This happened quickly enough not to cause any of the emergency personnel to think of calling to register a leak that might need immediate attention.

Finding no boiler on the upper floor, the fire officer, who had entered by the front door, returned to the kitchen to open all the windows. It was only then that the officer began to appreciate the full extent of the tragedy. He reports that only after dealing with the windows did he turn his attention to the people around the

kitchen table. He did try to resuscitate the three people he assumed had possibly lost consciousness after momentarily being overcome by the fumes. To his dismay, he found them to be unresponsive and judged them all dead.

Around the kitchen table were three bodies, all seated at the table as if waiting to be fed. Initially the officer felt they may be merely unconscious, but the reality was soon obvious. All three bodies were slumped forward, with heads and upper torsos actually lying on the tabletop. The table was set for a meal, with cutlery, plates and opened wine. There was spilled wine on the table and, crucially as it turns out, on the floor, some distance away from the table.

Mother and daughter, Gemma and Elsie Pitcairn were sitting side by side. The third body, that of a male in his forties has yet to be identified, but it is assumed to be Gemma Pitcairn's partner, Geoff Sullivan. This fact has yet to be confirmed, however, since Mr. Sullivan did not actually live at the address, but was only an occasional visitor, reportedly Gemma Pitcairn's boyfriend. The neighbours have testified seeing Mr. Sullivan regularly at the house, but it seems that no one was ever in social contact with him, reporting that he would say hello in passing in the street, but no more. It seems that Mr. Sullivan had always avoided contact with neighbours. He achieved his obviously desired anonymity to such an extent that the police recorded three significantly different descriptions of him from nearby residents.

A fourth place was set at the table. Next to this plate was a full glass of wine, apparently untouched, unlike those of Gemma and Elsie Pitcairn which were almost empty. The high-backed dining chair at that fourth place setting had been knocked over and was lying on the floor, as if someone had made a hasty exit, pushing it backwards in the process. We may assume that this was the place setting vacated by the fleeing Edward Pitcairn.

It was not obvious at the time, but soon became clear that the person on fire on the steps outside was indeed Edward Pitcairn. Though his daughter and granddaughter could be identified immediately and definitively, Edward Pitcairn's identity was only officially established after some forensic work via his dental records. His body was very badly mutilated both by the lithium fire and the subsequent burning of his clothing, and even neighbours who by then had approached the front gate did not recognise him. This, however, is not surprising because Edward Pitcairn, in later years, had spent most of his time in Indonesia, only sporadically returning to London. Given that he spent at most two weeks a year in his London home, it is highly likely that most of the neighbours would not even recognise him as a resident of the house.

We all know what certain journalists have written about this case, so we will not repeat those stories here. Suffice it to say that we utterly reject the populist and frankly vindictive interpretation of events. Not only is this version of events based on prejudice and political

opportunism, but it is also factually inaccurate. We will list one by one the factual incongruities that prove this slanderous account is utterly false.

What is not in dispute is that four people died, Edward Pitcairn, his daughter Gemma, his granddaughter Elsie and a male in his forties who may or may not be the man known as Geoff Sullivan, Gemma Pitcairn's boyfriend. Initial reports that the three occupants of the kitchen had been overcome by gas have now been proved to be false. All three died of a fentanyl overdose, ingested prior to the start of the gas leak, since none of the victims appears to have tried to move from their seat. We can reveal for the first time that the wine remaining in the bottle on the kitchen table was laced with enough fentanyl to kill fifty people. This fact would have been unknown to those who wrote the initial stories reporting the deaths, since it has only just been released, following a coroner's post-mortem on the victims. At least this one part of their otherwise wholly vindictive interpretation was an innocent error. Edward Pitcairn's body, so badly mutilated by fire, could not be definitively tested for the presence of drugs. It is likely, however, that he did not ingest any of the drugged wine, given that his glass was full, did not appear to have been touched and given, crucially, that he was able to walk as far as the steps into the street.

We have also, however, spoken to the pathologist who conducted the post-mortem. Off the record, she expressed grave concerns about

the circumstances that led to the male victim in the kitchen ingesting the poison. Both Gemma Pitcairn and Elsie Pitcairn were sitting next to wine glasses that were almost empty. We may assume that both had drunk the wine and thus ingested lethal doses of fentanyl.

The male on the other side of the table, however, thus far named as Geoff Sullivan, had not obviously used the wine glass that was within his reach. The pathologist also told us that there was evidence of red wine spillage on his face, neck and chest, with his shirt actually being described as ‘sodden’ with wine. We pressed the point in our interview with the pathologist, suggesting this male victim may have been forced to drink the poisoned wine, and may have vomited the contents of his mouth at least once, possibly more than once, in the process, thus explaining the spillage on the floor. The pathologist who inspected the body accepted that this scenario of forced ingestion was at least plausible. The pathologist went even further by releasing to us the finding that the male victim even had traces of wine in his lungs, indicating that he may have been choking or gagging as it was drunk.

Whatever is the explanation, however, it is clear that the male victim did not appear to have willingly drunk any of the fentanyl-laden wine. In some way or other, it had been forced into him, because the conclusive cause of death, as in the case of Gemma and Elsie Pitcairn, was fentanyl poisoning. None of the three victims of the kitchen table, incidentally, had been dead for

more than an hour. Crucially the pathologist also reported that the lungs did not contain methane at the concentration expected if they had actually breathed in contaminated air. This proves definitively, in our opinion, that all three victims in the kitchen were dead by the time the gas was turned on at the hob. This corroborates the theory that the gas leak began after the victims' deaths by poisoning.

Initially, it remained unclear whether the victim outside on the steps of the house was indeed Edward Pitcairn. So badly mutilated was the body that it took detailed forensic analysis to establish his identity. Initially, the body could equally have been that of Geoff Sullivan, who had become a frequent visitor to the house. Two weeks after the event, we are sure that the body outside was that of Edward Pitcairn, but still there exists no solid evidence that the victim inside the house was Mr. Sullivan. The initial reports that definitively place Mr. Sullivan inside and Edward Pitcairn outside on the steps had no basis in evidence known at the time that those reports of the tragedy were published. They might still be proven correct, but such definitive apparently factual reporting so soon after the event is now revealed as utterly unprofessional, either that or misinformed or indeed deliberately and conveniently misleading.

At this point we must collect our thoughts. This tragic incident has involved the death of four people, one of whom was the celebrated, even honoured archaeologist, Professor Edward Pitcairn. The tragedy is immense, even of

national significance. Edward Pitcairn's achievements will be reported and thus documented elsewhere, but we must here at least acknowledge his achievements, especially in relation to his elevating previously dismissed tribal art in Australia into the mainstream of historical human culture. In recent years, of course, he has devoted his time to researching early hominids in Southeast Asia, a project he managed jointly with his former student, Dr. Onggo Sarnu, of the Indonesian Ministry of Culture. Indeed, until last week, Dr. Sarnu's company, Uking Terbuka, was about to announce the renaming of its residential development in East London as Pitcairn Towers. We are told now that a final decision on this has yet to be made.

Which brings us back to the circumstances, until now only partly reported, surrounding Edward Pitcairn's apparent demise in a cremation on the front steps of his own house. The unlikely nature of the scenario need not be stressed, merely to state it is enough.

Previously unrecorded, we obtained the following details from one of the police officers who observed the scene, about an hour after the emergency services had completed their work.

"The big problem for us was the smell of gas, not just a smell but a dangerous concentration of gas in the kitchen and hallway that was not directly attributable to any locatable gas leak. The only place where the leak could have happened was from the kitchen hob, but all the controls were off. Later that evening, we had a gas engineer visit the site and he declared the

installation free of leaks. In addition, on the floor of the hallway between the kitchen and the front door, I discovered a thin white cable, about a meter in length, of the type that is generally associated with a mobile telephone charger. In fact, I can be quite specific. It was of a proprietary brand that matched the transformer that was still plugged in the socket next to the kitchen cooker. It appears that this cable may have been dropped in the hall, having previously been attached to the particular mobile telephone that later ignited next to Edward Pitcairn on the front steps. The phone Edward Pitcairn was holding was, of course, completely destroyed, so we cannot say definitively that this was the appliance that had been on charge in the kitchen."

In the reports published over the last two weeks, the existence of this cable on the floor of the hallway of the Pitcairn house has never been acknowledged. We regard its existence as conclusive proof that someone walked along that hallway after the other victims had died. This person was surely Edward Pitcairn and, since he had taken a mobile phone with him that was not his own, it is clear that he was intent on raising the alarm, not fleeing the scene. We here assert that this phone had definitely been on charge by the kitchen hob, that in his hurry to leave the room and only after turning off the gas controls, already perhaps short of breath, Edward Pitcairn snatched the phone on his way into the hall. The cable pulled out of the transformer but stayed

attached to the phone, only to come loose and fall to the ground before he reached the front door.

We have now pieced together what we believe is a wholly plausible chain of events which would assemble all known details. Before we do that, however, there remains one crucial question to be asked and then simply answered. This detail alone, it will be seen, rubbishes the claims made elsewhere about these events and the Pitcairn family in particular. What about the fentanyl? Where did it come from?

The populist press, of course, branded the Pitcairn family, mother Gemma and daughter Elsie in particular, as habitual, middle-class drug users. Both Gemma and Elsie Pitcairn are on record as admitting to having tried various drugs. Gemma Pitcairn wrote a widely published and quoted article a decade ago in which she argued for the decriminalization of various drug offenses and the legalization of certain substances. In that article, she admitted to having been a marijuana smoker in her youth. Elsie Pitcairn's former colleague from Xenon Media, when interviewed shortly after the incident at the Pitcairn house, was quoted as saying that the taking of cocaine by high earning professionals in the media industry is common. This led to reports that claimed Elsie Pitcairn was an habitual cocaine user. We have contacted the colleague in question, whom we can now name as Annie Kuroshi, a manager at Xenon Media, Elsie Pitcairn's former employer. We pressed her about the statement she made last week. She conceded that what she had said had been accurately

reported, but she also asserted that the information had been used very selectively and thus manipulated to tell a story she did not intend. She asserts that she was asked a general question about drug use amongst media professionals, and she did respond by saying that cocaine is very commonly used amongst many of her colleagues. But she also insists that she qualified this answer by saying that, in her experience, Elsie Pitcairn had never to her knowledge personally used that drug, or indeed any other drug. It seems that a media professional may have fallen foul of a selective soundbite quoted out of context.

We have also contacted at least ten people who have shared professional relationships with Elsie Pitcairn on projects ranging from television advertising, film production, music video production, conference presentations and even public relations campaigns. We took the trouble to insert the question about possible drug use on her part after other general questions about her character. Every single former colleague we contacted not only denied that Elsie Pitcairn was a drug user, but every single respondent also dismissed the idea as groundless. Elsie Pitcairn may have been driven by ambition, which sometimes made her as many enemies as friends, and undoubtedly, she was driven by a passion of commitment to environmental and community issues, but she never used drugs of any sort beyond alcohol. We are confident that the evidence we have will stand up in a court of law.

So where did the fentanyl come from? The answer is obvious. It came from Edward Pitcairn. He had a private, and, as it happens, wholly legal supply. No documentation exists to verify the source of the drug, of that we are sure. But we have a signed affidavit from Edward Pitcairn's private physician, Dr. Khan, which explains everything.

On a particular day, just three weeks before the incident, Edward Pitcairn made a second visit to his physician in Central London. Some weeks before Edward Pitcairn had attended his regular health check, an annual event that previously had always passed him fit enough to return to his work in the caves on Sawu, Indonesia, where he was researching evidence of early human settlement. This year, however, the assessment had been different.

Following bouts of ill health and a particularly serious physical collapse at work, Edward Pitcairn had undergone tests in hospital before he left Indonesia for his annual leave. It fell to Dr. Khan to deliver the results of those tests, which were definitive in finding that Edward Pitcairn was suffering from advanced pancreatic cancer, a condition that was assessed as terminal and inoperable.

At the time of diagnosis, Dr. Khan had offered Edward Pitcairn the possibility of repeated tests to double check the diagnosis. He also raised the possibility of Professor Pitcairn receiving palliative care, which might have extended his life expectancy by a few months. There was also the possibility of pain relief therapy. All of these

options were rejected by Edward Pitcairn for various reasons. At the time, he judged the pain relief in particular as irrelevant because he was then not in pain.

About five weeks ago, three weeks before the incident in the family home, however, Edward Pitcairn again made an appointment to see Dr. Khan a second time. He did not go through his normal channels, since he wanted to conceal his predicament from both his daughter and granddaughter. Had he made the appointment in the usual way, via his employer, Hackney Metro University, there was a chance that the information may have come to the attention of Gemma Pitcairn, since she knew the administrative staff dealing with her father very well.

Edward Pitcairn, by then, was suffering severe pain, agony that he continued to conceal from his family. He was, however, still trying to complete work that he said was his only priority. He had rejected palliative care involving chemotherapy and radiation therapy purely because both treatment options would have rendered him physically weak and thus unable to complete his work. It must be remembered that his condition precluded any possibility of cure.

He also rejected running the tests a second time. He had complete faith in the medical professionals in Indonesia and had no reason to doubt their diagnosis. In his opinion rerunning the tests would potentially take a week or more, given the succession of appointments and procedures that would have been necessary. This

again would have impaired his ability to complete his work.

The rejection of painkillers came about as a result of two considerations. One was simply that at the time of his diagnosis, he was in no pain. He was advised that this could change at any time, but he also observed that the painkillers might or perhaps would make him sleep. Again, he had the completion of his ongoing work at the forefront of his considerations. Three weeks before the tragedy, however, he admitted that the situation had changed considerably.

Edward Pitcairn arranged to see Dr. Khan privately. He stated explicitly that he did not want this consultation to be recorded on his medical records. Dr. Khan can explain why in his own words. “He wanted to shield his family members from knowledge of the pain he was experiencing. He was suffering severe pain, debilitating pain. What he wanted was some way of alleviating that so that he did not put extra pressure on Gemma, who was, as always, working too hard herself and was suffering increased stress because of the Covid rules. Nor did he want to put pressure on Elsie, who had recently lost her job and, in his estimation, was showing signs of depression. I described what I could prescribe, and he immediately told me he wanted to pay for the drugs himself, privately. He asked for extra doses. I explained that an overdose could prove fatal, especially if I prescribed a fentanyl-based painkiller. We physicians often tread a fine line. Imagine, I am confronted with a patient who has a terminal

condition who also thus far has shunned all pain relief. The patient now tells me he cannot bear the pain he is suffering. So, I prescribe a strong painkiller and explain the required dosage."

Edward Pitcairn did buy a fentanyl-based pain relief prescription. He did so three times, one week's supply on each visit. We have surveyed all the pharmacies near to Highbury Fields station and, in fact, it took less than a morning's work to locate the one that Edward Pitcairn used, unsurprisingly the closest one to the family home. The pharmacist, off the record, confirmed that an elderly man answering Edward Pitcairn's description did obtain pain killers on private prescriptions three times from the same store. The pharmacist remembers asking why the purchaser needed such strong pain killers and remembers the man replying that he was suffering from terminal pancreatic cancer. The answer was memorable, the pharmacist said, since such enquiries rarely provoke such specific, detailed or explicit responses.

Whether Edward Pitcairn actually used the pain killers, we cannot verify. It is possible that he stockpiled the prescriptions, perhaps with the intention of taking his own life with an overdose. How the stockpile, even if it did exist, finished up being added to a bottle of red wine destined for the table to accompany a family meal is a question that remains both unanswered and perplexing. It is a question, however, that will be addressed and answered in our version of events of that night those weeks ago when Edward Pitcairn died on the steps outside his own house,

while his daughter and granddaughter already lay poisoned within.

Before addressing these events directly, however, we must report, with due sensitivity, a conversation we had with Dr. Khan earlier this week. We put it to him, in direct, unequivocal terms, that he had been asked by Edward Pitcairn that he should supply him with a lethal dose of fentanyl in order to take his own life. Dr. Khan did admit that the combined dosage of three weeks' worth of the painkiller preparation would have been sufficient to create a lethal dose, if the whole quantity were to be ingested. We pressed him further on whether it would be enough to kill more than one person, but he would not offer an opinion, merely restating his intention had been to supply a terminally ill patient with palliative pain relief for a considerable period of time. We then pressed him on whether he had monitored Edward Pitcairn to see if he was actually using the prescribed drug. He stated clearly that he had not done so. He clarified, "The physician prescribes. The patient administers. The physician cannot know if the patient is actually taking the medication, unless it is administered under supervision in the type of scenario that Professor Pitcairn had ruled out, because he would not consent to be hospitalized. I trusted Edward Pitcairn to do what he said he would do. And that trust was based upon the many years I have known him as a patient. That is all a physician can do. I am prescribing potentially lethal medication to seriously ill patients all the time."

We pressed Dr. Khan on whether he had allowed Edward Pitcairn to access sufficient quantities of fentanyl in the knowledge that he would use it to take his own life. Dr. Kahn would offer no comment.

One last crucial detail needs to be recorded before we present our version of events. A neighbour along Crane Grove, resident some distance along the street, it has to be said, reported to us that at approximately seven o'clock on the evening of the Pitcairn house tragedy, a white van arrived outside the house. The neighbour's account does not record whether the van was marked in anyway and, if truth be told, the neighbour was too distant to have read any identification even if it had existed. A white van, a small saloon car-sized van, pulled up outside the Pitcairn house and two men in high visibility vests got out. These are the two men who were assumed in the populist press to be gas fitters called out to investigate a suspected leak. But, as we stated earlier, the visit by the gas company did not happen until after the tragedy had unfolded. Approximately half an hour later, two men in high visibility vests left the Pitcairn house and drove away in the same white van. We asked this witness whether the men who left were the same two men who had entered the house. The neighbour was not able to record any physical characteristics of either man, since they were too far away to be recognized.

In our version of events, the identities of these two men are crucial. No one from within the Pitcairn household reported a gas leak. To our

knowledge, no one in the Pitcairn household was expecting a call of any kind from engineers. We have checked with the Pitcairn's energy suppliers and with the local company that did regular odd jobs around the house. No one has any record of a request for a visit on that evening from anyone in the Pitcairn family. And neither did the mobile phones of either Gemma or Elsie Pitcairn reveal any recent communication with anyone who might have sent workmen to the house. Neither, of course, were they delivering food. It does not take half an hour to deliver a take-away and, in any case, the Pitcairns were cooking for themselves that night. There were prepared ingredients ready to be cooked on the kitchen work surfaces.

We have now arrived at the point where we must present our scenario. We reject, utterly reject the sequence of events as presented in the popular press. Edward Pitcairn did not deliberately poison his daughter, her lover and his granddaughter. And neither did he do so accidentally.

We do have in our possession a leaked document from a private security company that describes a sequence of events that was to be enacted. Our source made available to us a scenario suggesting that a person who regularly slept on the streets in the area would be substituted for one of the firm's operatives in an operation to dishonour the names of people involved with environmental protests in the capital. The leak did not specify a target or a method to be used. What it did say was that a

man in his forties was to be taken off the street, fed, clothed and generally cleaned up so he could be substituted for another to preserve that other man's identity. The person who leaked the story only did so after the Pitcairn deaths, since he thought he may have been involved in some way and wanted to clarify that he had played no part in delivering the man to the scene, only in his prior preparation. It is our conclusion that this substitute was to take the place of Geoff Sullivan at the Pitcairn's table. We also assert that this substitute was one of the two men who arrived in the white van at approximately seven o'clock.

Indeed, it is the role of Mr. Sullivan that is crucial to our story. He was an insider in the Pitcairn household. Presumably he knew about the existence of the fentanyl in Edward's room. It would thus have proved easy for him to access the drug, lace the wine and then serve it to the family.

It was then that he would have called his accomplice, asking him to deliver the stand-in Geoff Sullivan. By the time the two men in high visibility vests arrived at the house, the Pitcairn family, as far as Mr. Sullivan was concerned, were all dead. Except, of course, we know that Edward was not. The stand-in was duly delivered and, seeing what had happened in that kitchen, ceased to cooperate. He had to be force-fed the poisoned wine, hence the spillage on the male body and on the floor. The poison did obviously take effect and it was then that Sullivan placed his phone on charge next to the cooker and turned the hob's gas on. At which point he and

his accomplice left, Geoff Sullivan donning the high visibility vest on the way. This scenario thus explains why the male victim in the Pitcairn kitchen had no wallet, no mobile phone, nothing about his person that would facilitate his identification. Indeed, when police later searched the house, they found nothing whatsoever to suggest that someone called Geoff Sullivan had ever visited the house, let alone occasionally lived there.

About one hour later, by which time the gas concentration in the kitchen would have reached explosive levels, Sullivan would then ring the specially modified phone, whose battery was set to ignite. There would be a gas explosion in the kitchen and evidence of the poisoning would be erased by combustion, as would any possibility of ever identifying the stand-in.

What Geoff Sullivan did not do, however, was to ensure that Edward Pitcairn had indeed drunk his wine. In fact, Edward Pitcairn had self-administered one of his painkillers before going down to join the family in the kitchen. He had taken only a recommended dose and it took a while to have its full effect. When it did so, he fell asleep, deeply enough so he could not be easily roused. This explains the full glass of wine that was still at Edward's place on the kitchen table and also explains why Sullivan did not force any wine into Edward Pitcairn's mouth. Sullivan was under the impression that the job was already done.

The plan was for the gas to leak for about an hour. This would have raised the methane

concentration in the kitchen air to about six per cent, sufficient for a gas fire, though probably not an explosion to take place.

The specially modified mobile phone was ready to receive its call on charge next to the kitchen hob which was leaking gas. About a half hour after Geoff Sullivan left, Edward Pitcairn woke from his fentanyl sleep. His family was already dead at the table He smelled gas and reflexes took over. He stood, fired by a raw energy of survival, approached the gas hob and turned off all the controls. He then headed towards the door to the hall, a stagger, perhaps, of four or five steps past the mobile phone still on charge, lying on the work surface next to the hob.

Instinctively, he grasped the phone, aware, perhaps, that this was a means of raising an alarm.

But the phone was on charge. He grasped it and walked, quickly, his snatch disconnecting the charging cable from its transformer, not the phone. Halfway along the hall, the cable became detached from the phone as he staggered, perhaps supporting himself on the wall as he moved. This is the only explanation of the presence of the charging cable halfway along the house's entrance hall between the kitchen and the front door.

Edward Pitcairn made it to the front door. He opened it, probably staggering, still unable to breathe properly and already weak from his terminal cancer, plus the continuing residual effects of his painkiller drug. He made it as far as the front steps, perhaps still stumbling. The front

door of the house closed behind him. It had a sprung closure bracket. He lay down on those steps, or perhaps fell, exhausted and died there, not from fentanyl, and not from gassing, but from terminal pancreatic cancer.

Edward Pitcairn lay there dead for approximately half an hour. He was not noticed, because as Jaswant Singh testified, there was no one around. In addition, Edward Pitcairn had reached the bottom of the entrance steps, so he lay largely out of sight of anyone who did not directly peer through the barred gate that gave access to the street. Crucially, his death grasp still held tight that mobile phone from the kitchen. It had been on charge just minutes before, but now it was rigidly held by a dead hand close to his midriff.

But this was no ordinary mobile phone. It might sound speculative, to say the least, but Edward Pitcairn had inadvertently carried what was to be the detonator of a gas explosion. The mobile phone took its planned call. We must presume that it was Geoff Sullivan, now returned to a safe distance, who called his own number, set off a lithium battery fire and effectively cremated Edward Pitcairn. What it did not do, obviously, was ignite a gas explosion in the Pitcairn's kitchen in order to destroy both the fentanyl that had killed the three people at the dining table and to hide the identity of the male victim.

Edward Pitcairn was already dead. This is why the eyewitness account of Jaswant Singh describes no movement along the street before

the start of the fire. And, indeed, these flames caused no human reaction, despite the fact that the fire was actually burning through the body of an apparent victim. Had that victim retained any degree of consciousness, the flames would surely have prompted some reflex reaction. There was none. And there was none because Edward Pitcairn was already dead, and had been so, lying at the base of the family home's entrance steps, for at least half an hour.

As a result of our analysis, we declare the popular press analysis of events is completely false. Edward Pitcairn was innocent of having conspired to kill his family members. In fact, Gemma Pitcairn's lover, Geoff Sullivan was the instigator of a deliberate and planned attempt to eliminate the Pitcairn family and at the same time to destroy the persona and professional reputation of Edward Pitcairn.

Former colleague confirms Pitcairn story

The dust has now settled on the Pitcairn affair. It is over a month since we first reported on the tragedy that befell the Pitcairn family at the home in north London. Edward Pitcairn, Emeritus Professor of Archaeology at Hackney Metro University, is alleged to have poisoned his daughter, Gemma, his granddaughter, Elsie, and Gemma Pitcairn's live-in male companion, Geoff Sullivan. He was making his way out of the property, probably trying to escape the scene, when his mobile phone battery ignited. Already in frail health as a result of terminal pancreatic cancer, Edward Pitcairn made it only as far as the front steps of the house, where he collapsed, having closed the front door behind him. Whether as a result of the direct effects of the battery fire, his general weakness or indeed because of the shock brought on by the combined effects of the evening's events, he died there. His body was then consumed by fire as his clothes ignited.

At least that is what we originally reported. Since then, sources that are unsympathetic towards our editorial stance have published a different version of events, containing allegations against politicians, public servants and professionals who were not directly involved with the family tragedy, thus revealing the true motive of these politically motivated stories.

Crucial in this counter argument has been the identity of Gemma Pitcairn's partner, Geoff Sullivan. In the fiction invented to counter our analysis, it was not Mr. Sullivan who died in the

Islington kitchen, but a substitute designed to preserve the life, if not the identity of Sullivan. The case for the alternative interpretation rests on this assertion.

We can now reveal, definitively, that the person who died alongside Gemma and Elsie Pitcairn was, indeed, Geoff Sullivan.

In order to refute the nonsensical claims made by our competitors, we have conducted our own investigation. We followed leads provided by Elsie Pitcairn's mobile phone contacts, a copy of which came into our possession.

Elsie Pitcairn was active in several campaigning groups, all of them left wing or environmental. Mr. Sullivan regularly attended the same meetings as Elsie Pitcairn and sometimes even spoke at those gatherings. Now this evidence, of course, cannot claim to be definitive. Some of Elsie Pitcairn's contacts do remember Mr. Sullivan, and remember him well, largely because he was the person who usually was most vociferous in supporting Elsie Pitcairn's often extreme positions. He had previously, also, assisted Gemma Pitcairn in her work on behalf of the group 'Stay And Share', a group that campaigned unsuccessfully to secure a remain vote in the Brexit referendum. We also contacted others involved in 'Stay And Share', but the organization was very much a front for the personal views of Gemma Pitcairn, Elsie's mother, and others involved remembered little about Mr. Sullivan.

In the case of 'Off Uking Palace', however, Elsie Pitcairn's campaign to block the

construction of student accommodation in east London, we had significant success. Some contacts reported remembering Mr. Sullivan, but described him as a quiet, even reticent person, most of the time, only really participating in proceedings when it came to supporting the adoption of Elsie Pitcairn's extreme proposals at meetings. All described a dark-haired man in his late thirties or early forties, always in jeans, and a check shirt, sometimes with a dark pullover or anorak and always carrying a black box-like shoulder bag that had a zipper end-to-end along its top.

We accept that, as descriptions go, this is not much to go on. The victim seated at the Pitcairn's kitchen table, however, did answer this description, and crucially his bag was by his chair, a bag that was exactly as recalled by those who knew him.

We understand, also from the contacts from Elsie Pitcairn's telephone, that there was more than met the eye about the household. We know for definite from Gemma Pitcairn's colleagues that she had been in a relationship with Mr. Sullivan since the Brexit referendum five years ago. Their relationship was part time and had been broken off by both parties more than once, only to have been established anew.

It is interesting, but no more, that Gemma Pitcairn's colleagues had never met Mr. Sullivan except in passing. None of them had ever shared time with Gemma Pitcairn in the company of her partner, because, in the words of one of her closest collaborators in Hackney Metro, Gemma

Pitcairn was always a private person and did not like to mix her personal life with her work. For Gemma Pitcairn, home and office were always effectively separate, even though she often worked from home.

But we have discovered from Elsie Pitcairn's contacts that she was also in a relationship with Mr. Sullivan. Apparently, their friendship had grown as a result of his growing interest in her campaigns, especially that surrounding Uking Palace development, 'Off Uking Palace'. The particular contact we spoke to, whose identity will not be revealed by us, described a recent evening spent with Elsie Pitcairn where she related in detail a recent amorous encounter with Mr. Sullivan in the family home.

Here, we believe, we have also identified Edward Pitcairn's motive. We know that Professor Pitcairn had been, during his entire career the consummate professional. His achievements in relation to his work in Australia and again in his current, long-lasting and thorough work in Indonesia, confirm his status as a significant academic in his field and also illustrate that, as a person, he was utterly correct, responsible, respected and dedicated.

We have also learned that Professor Pitcairn's diagnosis of terminal illness was only made just a few weeks ago. He had originally planned only his usual, short project evaluation visit to London. In the past he had been back in Indonesia a week or two later, but this year, because of the discovery of his medical condition, he had

decided to stay, knowing that he had but weeks to live.

Picture the situation, then, where, for the first time in decades, Edward Pitcairn is again sharing a house full-time with his daughter, living alongside his granddaughter for the first time during her adult life and finding that both of them are sharing a bed with the lodger! It is hard to imagine the level of disillusion that was felt by a man like Professor Pitcairn at learning this. Whether he had actually disowned them is unclear. That he was unhappy, even angry about the situation in which he found himself, is beyond dispute. There are reports, albeit unconfirmed, that he had already confronted his granddaughter about her behaviour and lifestyle. It is possible that his judgment or personality had changed as a result of his illness.

For whatever reason, and with only a short time to live, he suddenly found his life unbearable because, in his eyes, his family was effectively betraying him. He had been prescribed the painkillers for his medical condition, but he had not been taking them. He had stockpiled enough of the fentanyl to deliver his judgment and deliver it he did. We are not condoning what he did for one moment, but we believe this, along with the changed mental state of a dying man, explains events.

There remains, of course, the central point of the alternative explanation, the identity of Mr. Sullivan, and whether he carried out the poisoning and then fled, leaving a surrogate in his place, the crucial detail upon which rests the

alternative, conspiratorial interpretation of events.

We can now reveal an answer to that question. Also on Elsie Pitcairn's contact list were several of her former work colleagues from the media production company where she was employed until June this year. One particular colleague, indeed the manager who eventually delivered the company's decision to let her go, confirmed a crucial detail. For some weeks prior to that June meeting, she had herself been in a passing relationship with Mr. Sullivan, completely unknown to Elsie Pitcairn.

The two had met at an 'Off Uking Palace' meeting some weeks before. Elsie Pitcairn's colleague had indeed only attended the meeting following Elsie's specific request. The Xenon Media manager explained that Elsie Pitcairn had persuaded her to come to the gathering to see if she might be interested in joining the campaign. It has to be remembered that during this last year, we have all suffered from being locked in at home and many of us have craved for social contact. Elsie Pitcairn, it seemed, had been speaking about feelings of isolation brought on by the Covid pandemic to her manager colleague, who had revealed that she herself has been suffering from depression recently and was feeling an acute need for social contact. In response, Elsie Pitcairn extended her invitation.

Elsie's colleague attended the meeting, was introduced to Mr. Sullivan and slept with him the following night. The relationship continued,

spanning the four weeks or so before the Pitcairn family tragedy.

Elsie Pitcairn's Xenon Media colleague has described the existence of a particular birthmark on Mr. Sullivan's body, a patch of purplish discoloured skin on his left shoulder blade, obviously only known to those with whom he had some intimate contact.

We ourselves contacted the pathologist who supervised the post-mortems on the Pitcairn victims. We were careful not to ask any information to be divulged that could prejudice the case in any way. We were doubly careful to clarify our own position, so that we would not in any way compromise the pathologist, allowing her to make the decision as to whether our question could be, indeed ought to be answered.

What we did was pass on the description of Mr. Sullivan's identifying birthmark to the pathologist and asked her merely to confirm, yes or no, whether the body in question possessed such a mark. It did.

We state here, for the first time in this case, and without any residual doubt, that the third victim in the Pitcairn kitchen that night was indeed the man known to both Elsie and Gemma Pitcairn as Geoff Sullivan. We offer this as proof of our story relating to the Pitcairn deaths and as an obvious rebuttal to alternative, spurious, even conspiratorial theories.